

“It’s *stupid* being a girl!”
The Tomboy character in
Selected Children’s Series Fiction

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

The tomboy is a female character that has featured prominently in many popular works of children's literature. Typically, the tomboy is a prepubescent or teenaged girl who is frustrated by the expectations and limitations placed upon her because she is female. She is reluctant to conform to feminine standards of appearance and behaviour.

This thesis examines the representation and evolution of the tomboy character in two distinct categories of children's series fiction, 'books in a series' and 'series books',¹ focusing on narratological elements such as plot, characterisation and series structure, as well as their publishing context, exploring issues of authorial intent, editorial decisions and, in certain cases, the official revision of texts. 'Books in a series' are usually presented as *bildungsroman* – that is, stories, or in this case, *series*, of development. In these narratives, time progresses and the characters age; tomboyishness is depicted as a temporary phase which is grown out of when a girl matures, and learns to accept and perform femininity. In contrast, 'series books' are centred on adventure and/or mystery stories, rather than on the process of growing up – the characters' ages are typically frozen, and tomboyishness is a distinguishing character attribute which remains for the course of the series.

¹ Inness, Sherrie A., ed. *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997, p.2.

In studying children's literature, it is important to acknowledge that the audience of children's literature includes adults as well as children – it is after all, adults who determine and control the production, distribution and legitimisation of texts for children. Originally, children's literature was written specifically for the religious, moral, behavioural and social instruction of children, rather than for their entertainment. Although appearing less overtly didactic in recent times, the production of children's literature has continued to be driven by the adult concern for ideological appropriateness, and the desire to responsibly educate its young readers. This concern and desire are fuelled by the underlying and persistent belief that children are like sponges and will absorb whatever they are exposed to², including representations of gender difference and gender performance. The ways in which the tomboy character has evolved in the children's series are a direct reflection of the shifts in society's ideas about gender, the gendered education of children, and the adult conception of what is ideologically appropriate for the children's text.

The tomboy character in children's literature has been an important cultural marker of both our evolving and *constant* values. It is clear that over time gender roles have changed significantly, allowing girls in series fiction to be sleuths, rescuers, warriors and adventurers, but through all of this change, the representation of the tomboy has always reflected adults' conception of what is ideologically appropriate and *normal* and therefore *desirable*, in the representation of masculinity

² Sternheimer, Karen. *It's Not the Media: The Truth About Pop Culture's Influence on Children*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003, p.181.

and femininity, gender and sexuality in children's literature – a normality and system of gender based on a steadfast heterosexual hegemony.

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Introduction

The child in the opposite bed sat up and looked across at Anne. She had very short curly hair, almost as short as a boy's. Her face was burnt a dark-brown with the sun, and her very blue eyes looked as bright as forget-me-nots in her face. But her mouth was rather sulky, and she had a frown like her father's.

'No,' she said. 'I'm not Georgina.'

'Oh!' said Anne, in surprise. 'Then who are you?'

'I'm George,' said the girl. 'I shall only answer if you call me George. I hate being a girl. I won't be. I don't like doing the things that girls do. I like doing the things that boys do. I can climb better than any boy, and swim faster too. I can sail a boat as well as any fisher-boy on this coast. You're to call me George. Then I'll speak to you. But I shan't if you don't.'

Five on a Treasure Island, Enid Blyton¹

This thesis examines the representation and evolution of the tomboy character in selected children's series fiction from the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, focusing on literary elements such as plot, characterization and narrative/series structure, as well as the publishing background and cultural context of the texts. It is, in a sense, an inter-disciplinary thesis, combining cultural and literary analysis. I will argue that the ways in which the tomboy character has evolved in children's literature are a direct reflection of the shifts (and also, to a certain extent, *of what has remained constant*) in our ideas about gender and the adult conception of what is *ideologically appropriate* for the children's text.

¹Blyton, Enid. *Five on a Treasure Island*. Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981, pp.17-18.

The tomboy is a character that has featured prominently in many popular works of nineteenth and twentieth century children's literature, including some of the longest-running girls' mystery and adventure series. The tomboy was a prepubescent or teenaged girl frustrated by the expectations and restraints placed upon her because she was female. She preferred the physical activities of boys and was resentful when she was excluded from participating in them.² She was portrayed as hot-tempered, brave, blunt, and stubborn, and she often treated feminine girls with impatience and scorn. She was uncomfortable with and/or reluctant to conform to feminine standards of appearance and behaviour, and favoured shorts, trousers, jeans or even riding breeches over dresses and skirts. Especially in texts from the mid-twentieth century onwards, it became common for the tomboy to have short hair, in defiance of the femininity represented by long hair. The tomboy often had freckles and was "brown-skinned" from her love of being outdoors. In some cases, the tomboy rejected her own name in preference for a shorter or masculinised version: Josephine became Jo, Georgina or Georgia became George.³

² In *The Oxford English Dictionary* we see how the meaning of the word "tomboy" evolved, from its original meaning of "a rude, boisterous, or forward boy" in the mid-1500s; to "a bold or immodest woman" later that same century; to the definition we are probably most familiar with in the late-1500s: "a girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy; a wild romping girl..." In *Womankind* (1876), Charlotte Yonge wrote about "tomboyism" as "a wholesome delight in rushing about at full speed, playing at active games, climbing trees, rowing boats, making dirt-pies, and the like...". From <http://www.oed.com/> Accessed May 2004. Owain Jones makes an important point that "such views of female children existed whether or not the term tomboy was actually mobilised", citing the example of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, first published in 1818, where the description as a child of Catherine Moreland, the story's heroine clearly presents the profile of a young tomboy. "Tomboy tales: The rural, nature and gender of childhood", *Gender, Place and Culture* vol.6, no. 2, 1999, p.125.

³ Later on, as part of her interesting evolution, in the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, the tomboy George 'became' Georgia. See Chapter Three, "The Clue of the Ghost-Written Tomboy (and her Cousin) Part I" for details.

Before looking at the evolution of the tomboy character we need to look at children's literature and the beliefs that have driven it. It is important to understand that children's literature was originally written specifically for the religious, moral, behavioural and social instruction of children, rather than just for their entertainment. Until the end of the seventeenth century, it was widely believed that children were naturally sinful and therefore required firm instruction and constant discipline. Accordingly, the books produced specifically for children during this time were nearly all schoolbooks, religious books or instructional texts about manners and morals.⁴ By the early eighteenth century, however, a very different view of the child gained popularity: children were born in a state of innocence; sinfulness was not innate, but *learned*.⁵ The education of children and the books they read were therefore seen as crucially important in the shaping of their minds and morals.⁶

In *Girls Only?: Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880–1910*, Kimberley Reynolds discusses the role of separate literatures written for boys

⁴ Townsend, J. R. *Written for Children*, p.20.

⁵ Townsend, J. R. *Written for Children*, p.26, my italics. This is the notion of *tabula rasa* (Latin for "scraped slate", more often translated as "blank slate"). In *Thoughts Concerning Education* published in 1693, John Locke recommended that a child be given "some easy pleasant book, suited to his capacity... wherein the entertainment that he finds might draw him on and reward his pains in reading... and yet not such as should fill his head with perfectly useless trumpery. Or lay the principles of vice and folly." Quoted in Townsend, J. R. *Written for Children*, p.27.

⁶ Judith Rowbotham suggests that "it was presumed by adults that carefully written and chosen didactic fiction could be used as a means of social control for children. It was thought that stories could have the effect of painlessly leading the youthful readers to the paths that adult society wished them to follow to ensure that the next generation would maintain the values and traditions of its parents and teachers". *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989, p.3.

and girls during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century.^{7 8} Books for boys and books for girls were written to be “instructive, elevating and sexually appropriate”⁹ to form an important part of their gender-specific and gender-appropriate socialisation:

The idealised images of masculinity and femininity in these books preserved notions of childhood innocence and instructed young readers in what was socially acceptable without introducing troublings of sexuality.¹⁰

Although popular children’s literature today tends not to be overtly didactic, this thesis will argue that there is still a concern and preoccupation amongst adults – the authors, editors, publishers, educators, librarians and parents – with the issue of appropriate content in literature produced for children, because, as John Stephens argues: “children’s fiction belongs firmly within the domain of cultural practices

⁷ See Sally Mitchell’s *The New Girl: Girls’ Culture in England, 1880–1915*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, for an interesting study of the emergence of separate “girls’ culture” in the late nineteenth century, as a by-product of changes in economic circumstances and in the academic and professional education opportunities that became available to girls. This girls’ culture presented models of active independence and new ways - physical, mental and emotional - of experiencing the world. Chapter Five, *To Be a Boy*, provides an in-depth discussion on the tomboy figure and the issues surrounding “girls’ craving for boy life” as evident in reading materials including fiction and non-fiction books and magazines, and memoirs. She also discusses male privilege, the rise and role of the Scout and Guide movements, and the issue of “gender anxiety” that resulted in the rise in prominence of girls’ boyishness that became evident in different aspects of culture.

⁸ Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig provide a survey of girls’ literature in *You’re a Brick, Angela!: A New Look at Girls’ Fiction from 1839 to 1975* (first published 1976 and revised 1986; latest edition, 2003, includes fiction up to 1985). The book discusses not only the literature (including texts featuring tomboys) but also the social changes and cultural context of the times which contributed towards the types of characters and heroines portrayed, and the themes and genres which developed in fiction for girls over the years.

⁹ Reynolds, Kimberley. *Girls Only?: Gender and Popular Children’s Fiction in Britain, 1880-1910*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, p.34. Reynolds’ study examines the social and cultural conditions in which boys’ and girls’ literatures were produced. Reynolds suggests that although many changes have taken place in the form and subject matter of children’s literature, “there has been little movement in the representation of sexual difference”, p.154.

¹⁰ Reynolds, K. *Girls Only?*, p.40.

which exist for the purpose of socializing their target audience”.¹¹ This is something which has remained constant; the content, presentation and packaging of the children’s text may have changed, but its underlying aim has not. The preservation and non-corruption of childhood innocence is still carefully and consciously managed, through children’s literature that must be *ideologically acceptable*.

Adults are in the position to restrict, control and dictate the content of the fiction written for children, and they form a significant part of the audience of children’s literature – the “ambivalent audience”, according to Zohar Shavit:

...children’s literature is subject to systemic constraints that are imposed on the texts and to a large extent determine their characterization and presentation. One of the most powerful constraints is the special and often ambiguous status of the addressee in a children’s book, since it must appeal to the child reader and the adult, who is regarded in culture as both superior to the child and as responsible for deciding what is appropriate reading material for the child. This tendency has developed because our present culture, or at least the establishment involved in the production of children’s books, attach great importance to the child’s reading material as crucial for his development and his mental welfare.¹²

¹¹ Stephens, John. *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. Harlow, Essex; New York: Longman, 1992, p.9.

¹² Shavit, Zohar. *The Poetics of Children's Literature*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986, p.93.

Although the adult concern with appropriate content has remained a constant force and influence in the production of children's literature, the specific details of what denotes appropriate reading material for children has shifted and varied over time, in accordance with shifts in society's values. Throughout this thesis, I will demonstrate how such shifts are reflected in the representation of the figure of the tomboy in children's literature – in Chapter Six, for example, I discuss how attitudes towards girls' active participation in fighting have changed, from the time of the Famous Five and C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* to Tamora Pierce's recently published fantasy series. As Shavit states,

...the basic idea about writing for children, that is, that children's books should be written under the supervision of adults and should contribute to the child's spiritual welfare, has not changed... What *have* changed are specific ideas prevalent in each period about education and childhood. However, the idea that books for children have to be suitable from the pedagogical point of view and should contribute to the child's development has been, and still is, a dominant force in the production of children's books.¹³

Although this thesis is focused on the tomboy character and on children's literature, it is also a thesis about the values, desires and concerns of adults – not of children. Peter Hunt argues, and I agree, that “children's books very often contain what

¹³ Shavit, Z. *The Poetics of Children's Literature*, pp.26-27.

adults think children can understand, and what they should be allowed to understand; and this applies to ‘literariness’ as well as to vocabulary or content”.¹⁴

In her work entitled *It's Not the Media: The Truth About Pop Culture's Influence on Children*, Karen Sternheimer argues that the fear of social change as well as popular misconceptions about the idea of childhood innocence and what it means to be a child are at the root of our culture, and have resulted in society's adults blaming the media for many social problems – she examines issues related to media violence, cartoons, video games, music, advertising, sex and the Internet. Sternheimer writes:

Childhood is a construction based on adult hopes and needs; it's something we create rather than a fixed reality. Childhood is not just a biological phase that people pass through but is an idea collectively constructed to serve adult needs and historical conditions.¹⁵

Sternheimer's chapter “Fear of Sex” examines the power structures behind sexual practice and the ways in which ideas about sexuality are reinforced through the media. The chapter focuses on issues related to heterosexual practice, primarily parental fear of teen pregnancy and promiscuity. In this thesis, I will show how publishers' “Fear of Sex” directly led to revisions in the Trixie Belden series which affected its eponymous tomboy character. Furthermore, I will extend Sternheimer's argument to look at how the fear of homosexuality (the “Fear of *Homo* Sex”, or

¹⁴ Hunt, Peter. *An Introduction to Children's Literature*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, p.5.

¹⁵ Sternheimer, Karen. *It's Not the Media: The Truth About Pop Culture's Influence on Children*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003, pp.25-26.

rather, the fear of non-normative gendered behaviour associated with homosexuality) has been addressed in children's literature in relation to the figure of the tomboy. On the idea of children's innocence, Sternheimer writes:

It is often through the media that adults must face the reality that children do not necessarily embody innocence as adults expect them to. Innocence is a pawn, used in attempt to control popular culture and regulate children's knowledge.¹⁶

The regulation of children's knowledge therefore includes the regulation of their reading material – the regulation of children's literature. Sternheimer's argument is very much a Foucaultian one, stating that “while sexuality is personal, the uses and meanings attached to the practice are decidedly social and linked with broader systems of power”.¹⁷ It is this broader system of power in which heterosexuality is equated with normality – a system of heteronormativity (or what Judith Butler has called the heterosexual hegemony¹⁸), which legitimises what are deemed acceptable representations of gender in children's literature.

¹⁶ Sternheimer, K. *It's Not the Media*, p.25.

¹⁷ Sternheimer, K. *It's Not the Media*, p.188.

¹⁸ Salih, S. “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions (1990)” [Editor's Introduction], in Salih, S., ed. with J. Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.91. Also see *Extracts from Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler: Interview by Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal*, 1993. Accessed 1 October 2006. <http://www.theory.org.uk/but-int1.htm>.

In “Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children”, Robert D. Sutherland writes about the ways in which ideology is expressed within children’s literature.¹⁹ Sutherland defines authors’ ideologies as

...their notions of how the world *is* or ought to *be*. These values – reflecting a set of views and assumptions regarding such things as ‘human nature,’ social organization and norms of behavior, moral principles, questions of good and evil, right and wrong, and what is important in life.²⁰

Sutherland names three categories through which ideologies are expressed within children’s literature: the politics of advocacy, the politics of attack, and the politics of assent. Of these, *advocacy* and *assent* are most relevant to my argument regarding the ways in which the tomboy was portrayed and evolved in children’s literature. Sutherland explains that “[a]dvocacy *seeks* to persuade readers of its ideology; to promote the authors’ world views and notions of what is or ought to be; to influence readers’ thinking, feeling and behavior”.²¹ As I will discuss in detail in the first chapter, Alcott’s *Little Women* and its sequels are overtly didactic and present clearly identifiable episodic lessons throughout. *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second*, especially, depict what is expected of a girl as she grows up – she must abandon her tomboyishness and take on an appropriate and ‘sensible’ female role or even multiple roles, such as teacher, wife, and mother. The politics of advocacy works on the assumption (if we follow Sternheimer’s argument) that children *are* like sponges and *will* absorb the desirable behaviours presented in the

¹⁹ Sutherland, Robert. D. “Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children.” *Children’s Literature in Education* 16, no. 3, 1985, pp. 143-157.

²⁰ Sutherland, R. D. “Hidden Persuaders”, p.143.

²¹ Sutherland, R. D. “Hidden Persuaders”, p.147.

books they read. As Sutherland suggests, "...the politics of advocacy serves the aims of indoctrination, *urging* a particular value system or course of action, or attempting to enforce conformity to a set of behavioral norms..."²²

The politics of advocacy works hand in hand with, not independently of, the politics of assent, through the figure of the tomboy in children's literature. Children's literature reflects society's ideas and assumptions about normality and the world – how the world is and what are believed to be acceptable representations of the world. Sutherland explains the politics of assent as follows:

Fully as persuasive, in its own way, as advocacy, it does not advocate in any direct sense, but simply affirms ideologies generally prevalent in the society. As I am defining it, 'assent' is an author's passive, unquestioning acceptance and internalization of an established ideology, which is then transmitted in the author's writing in an unconscious manner. The ideology subscribed to is a set of values and beliefs widely held in the society at large which reflects the society's assumptions about what the world *is*.²³

Furthermore regarding the politics of assent, Sutherland asserts that the author is not necessarily consciously aware of the ideology behind the work. I agree on this point, and in relation to the tomboy, I suggest the politics of assent has played a role in her gradual 'disappearance' from children's series fiction. Children's literature, as a socializing tool, as ideologically acceptable, as a reflection of how the world is and should be, and as a representation of how gendered subjects should be and

²² Sutherland, R. D. "Hidden Persuaders", p.146.

²³ Sutherland, R. D. "Hidden Persuaders", p.151.

become, presents a world of heteronormativity – one of hegemonic, normative heterosexuality, which is threatened and problematised by the figure of the “masculine girl”. Sutherland goes on to state:

Since neither author nor readers can conceive the world as being otherwise than what the ideology claims, the ideology – when expressed in a published literary work – is persuasive because it tends to support and reinforce the status quo. As such, its expression is political: the book promulgates and promotes a particular ideology (to the exclusion of others); and, by its reinforcement of widely held views, inhibits change.²⁴

Of course, another significant factor in the tomboy’s disappearance should be acknowledged at this point. Changes to gender roles have no doubt resulted in more egalitarian representations of the sexes in children’s fiction. The texts have evolved to represent a world where there are fewer tomboys than there used to be. It is arguable that with girls having more freedom and fewer limitations based on gender, the tomboy has had less to rebel against, fewer reasons to exist. But to attribute the tomboy’s disappearance merely to “shifts in gender roles” is to take a simplistic view of what are quite complex relationships that contribute to our ideas about children’s literature and what is ideologically appropriate for children – this thesis will explore how the tomboy figure has both complied with and troubled the powerful and persistent norms which govern children’s literature.

²⁴ Sutherland, R. D. “Hidden Persuaders”, p.152.

For my analysis of the series texts in this thesis, I have adopted Sherrie Inness' two distinct categories of series fiction: "books in a series" and "series books".²⁵ In "books in a series", time progresses and characters age; these stories are usually *bildungsroman*: stories (or in this case, series) of development, which traditionally depict tomboyishness as a temporary phase which is grown out of when a girl matures and learns to accept femininity. In "series books", characters' ages are typically frozen, and the stories are centred on adventure and/or mystery, rather than on the process of growing up. But although the tomboys in "series books" do not age or develop, they do change in certain cases, which I will discuss in this thesis. As part of my research, I have looked at a fascinating aspect of children's literature: the official revision of children's texts, carried out by publishers to ensure the ideological appropriateness of their texts; I explore this throughout the thesis as further evidence towards my main argument – that the evolution of the tomboy has been a direct reflection of our ideas about gender and of what is ideologically appropriate for the children's text.

I have set out to trace the evolution of the tomboy character by focusing on a number of texts which include works from the so-called 'canon' of children's literature as well as some of the most popular series of all time. Largely ignored by scholars (although this has been changing in more recent times) and sanctimoniously banned by librarians,²⁶ such immensely popular texts have a

²⁵ Inness, Sherrie A., ed. *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997, p.2.

²⁶ See Romalov, Nancy Tillman. "Children's Series Books and the Rhetoric of Guidance: A Historical Overview" In *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, edited by Carolyn Stewart and Nancy Tillman

cultural value that is worthy of study. In fact, I believe that the most popular texts of all, even those written to the most repetitive and predictable of formulae, are of the greatest importance because of their very popularity, their longevity and their continued presence in book shops and in readers' and our overall cultural consciousness. They were read by many children, and therefore would have influenced (and their production influenced by) a large audience and significant sector(s) of society. Popular girls' fiction, for example, reinforces particular cultural ideologies about gender and sexuality, and in doing so plays an important role in the socialization of girls.²⁷ Further to this point, John G. Cawelti suggests that:

Formulaic stories affirm existing interests and attitudes by presenting an imaginary world that is aligned with these interests and attitudes... By confirming existing definitions of the world, literary formulas help to maintain a culture's ongoing consensus about the nature of reality and morality. We assume, therefore, that one aspect of the structure of formula is this process of confirming some strongly held conventional view.²⁸

Children's formula fiction works in this very way, reinforcing particular ideas about reality, morality and *normality*. Part of the representation of normality is the assumed heterosexuality of characters in children's fiction, and the patriarchal

Romalov Dyer, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995, pp.113-120 for historical background on the debate concerning children's reading of mass-marketed series books. Barbara Black's essay in the same compilation, entitled "Using Series as Bait in the Public Library" pp.121-123, presents a librarian's perspective on the place of children's mass-marketed series books in the library.

²⁷ Inness, Sherrie A., ed. *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997, p.1 [From the Introduction by Sherrie A. Inness].

²⁸ Cawelti, John G. *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976, p.35.

male/female and masculine/feminine binary, which will be explored at length in this thesis.

As this thesis presents an examination of the evolution of the tomboy character, the texts discussed in the chapters follow a roughly chronological order.

The first chapter includes an examination of a character who was a precursor of sorts, to the tomboy figure: Ethel May of Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*. Although the text never actually names her as a tomboy, Ethel displays many of the attributes that we have come to associate with the tomboy, and her troubled journey from girlhood to womanhood has become a familiar one in children's literature. The focus of the chapter however, is Jo March, the tomboy figure in Louisa May Alcott's "books in a series" about the March family: *Little Women* (1868 and 1869, *Part Second*), *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886). As was the style of the time in texts written for a young audience, the tone of these texts is much more overtly didactic than others subsequently discussed in this thesis. The experiences of the tomboy and her sisters are clearly instructional, presented as lessons on acceptable and desirable behaviour, temperament and ambition. Interestingly, the story of Jo can be interpreted as being both instructive and subversive. While she meets with conventional standards of femininity in growing up to become a wife, mother and responsible instructor and nurturer of children, it is arguable that Jo is at her most memorable and beloved, passionate and creative, when she is the young, blunt-spoken, "wild" and "bad" Jo. I will discuss

the constraints Alcott faced as an author writing a book for girls in the nineteenth century, which no doubt played a role in the fate of Jo March.

The second chapter focuses on the Little House series (1932-1943) by Laura Ingalls Wilder, which tells the autobiographically-based story of development of a tomboy named Laura Ingalls. I explore the representation of the tomboy and of gender in the series, using Judith Butler's argument that gender is created by various acts and performances that are *repeated*. Through their contrasting temperaments and repeated actions, Laura's Ma and Pa represent the distinction between feminine and masculine. Ma has a little rhyme about her daily routine, which Laura and her sisters know and repeat; Pa tells stories and sings songs that assert his gender and his ability to have adventures and interact with nature away from the home. We see how young Laura is drawn to what Pa represents – the masculine, freedom, adventure, change and unpredictability. Ma represents everything opposite to that – femininity, propriety, domesticity, self-restraint and stability. As Laura grows up, she learns to accept and correctly perform femininity – to become more like Ma. The series depicts this process of Laura's gendering, which involves her becoming more than what Butler calls a disciplined body; Laura learns to become a *self*-disciplined feminine body. This chapter also includes discussion about and comparison with the tomboy *Caddie Woodlawn* (1935).

The third and fourth chapters focus on two popular American girls' mystery series, the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories (1930-2003) and the Trixie Belden Mystery

series (1948-1986). Both series were ghost-written and published under pseudonyms. Both series were formulaic, mass-marketed and produced to be popular and lucrative for their respective publishers. The tomboy of the Nancy Drew series was George Fayne, one of Nancy's two best friends, and Trixie Belden herself was a tomboy. Both series have had impressive lifespans. The evolution of the tomboy characters in both series provides an excellent illustration of how adult concerns regarding appropriate representations of gender and sexuality affected the texts and characters in popular series. Both series underwent official revisions to update language and remove what were identified as sexist and racial stereotypes. In the Nancy Drew texts, the character of George Fayne was gradually demasculinised, her tomboyishness diminished. George's ultra-feminine cousin Bess also evolved in ways that reflected changes to ideas about femininity. While George's original overt boyishness was replaced by 'sportiness', Bess's body became less plump while she became increasingly preoccupied with body image and dieting. The tomboyishness of Trixie Belden was established and highlighted in the first six books of the series which were written by Julie Campbell, but in subsequent titles Trixie's characterisation suffered from a certain amount of inconsistency. A significant aspect of Trixie Belden's revision involved the toning down of her developing romantic relationship with her best friend's brother Jim which had been progressively building up from their first meeting. In Trixie's case, it was not a case of questionable gendered behaviour but the publishers' fear of her developing (hetero) sexuality. Although the publishers removed the references to Trixie and Jim's budding romance, the heterosexual hegemony is evident in the

texts – through *the gaze*, which reflects heteronormative perspectives and heterosexually ‘correct’ behaviour – I discuss this in terms of Trixie’s gaze upon herself, her gaze upon other girls, and upon members of the opposite sex.

Chapter Five looks at possibly the most famous and fondly-remembered tomboy of all time, George of Enid Blyton’s Famous Five series (1942-1963), as well as the lesser known but equally memorable Bill of the Malory Towers school series (1946-1951). George possesses perhaps the most extreme of tomboyish attitudes, displays the most passionate rejection of being female and demonstrates the most deliberate performance of masculinity. Blyton has been widely criticised for George’s failure to develop or grow out of her tomboyishness. The Famous Five’s ages were frozen after their third adventure, and all the children were ‘stuck’ in their attitudes and roles. George, as the tempestuous tomboy played a distinct and important role in the narratives as a plot enabler - her stubbornness and insistence on doing things her way and always putting her dog Timmy first often led to exciting plot developments.

The character of George is a significant representation of girls’ desire for equality and emancipation from gender-based limitations. But frustratingly for George and for us, she is ultimately unable to break out of her place in patriarchy and the masculine/feminine binary; she remains female and inferior, even with her short hair, boy’s clothes and boy’s name; her character flaws and vulnerabilities such as her inability to control her temper, and her obsession with her dog Timmy

cement her perpetual inferiority. As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, despite the tomboy character's resistance, ultimately she did not *and could not* completely break free of the "cultural norms, laws and taboos", which constrained her gender performance choices.²⁹ Such cultural norms, laws and taboos resulted in Alcott ending *Little Women, Part Second* with marriage and motherhood for Jo, which I discuss in Chapter One, and Blyton always having Julian and Dick intervene to prevent George from getting into physical fights with other boys.

It is interesting to note that the character of Anne, George's cousin, can be viewed ambivalently; while it is true she takes on the seemingly passive roles, we can also see that she is capably and actively in charge as housekeeper for the Five. Just as Jo March's happiness, success and skills in her roles of wife, mother, and instructor of children are often dismissed – we see Jo's acceptance of conventional femininity as less preferable, less satisfying, somehow, to the lofty ambitions represented by her "Castle in the Air" – Anne's power often goes unnoticed. Instead of seeing Anne as a young domestic goddess, we see tend to see her as the subservient, passive housekeeper for her cousins.

As I examine the characters of the tomboys George and Bill within their respective series, framed against the criticisms of poor literary quality and political incorrectness in Blyton's work, I will argue that while Blyton's texts are undoubtedly formulaic and repetitive, they are certainly not as flawed and inferior

²⁹ Salih, S. "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault" [Editor's Introduction], in Salih, S., ed. with J. Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, p.21.

as is often claimed. Although her texts may present seemingly problematic values today, they did reflect the politics of assent of the time of their first publication; Blyton did after all, by her own admission, aim to educate as well as entertain her young audience.

In the final chapter, I examine two fantasy series by Tamora Pierce, *The Song of the Lioness* quartet (1983-1988) and the *Protector of the Small* quartet (1999-2002), looking at the series within the frame of three interconnected types of text: young adult, fantasy and *bildungsroman*. These texts are aimed at a young adult audience and are also affected by similar adult concerns regarding ideological appropriateness which have influenced the production of the texts discussed in earlier chapters. As *bildungsroman* they differ from traditional female stories of development in that their heroines can and do choose to prioritise careers as well as marriage and family. Although set in fantasy worlds featuring magic and immortal creatures, the series still reflect responsible “real world” ideas of normality and morality. The societies and characters depicted in these texts are overtly heterosexual and fit neatly with the heterosexual hegemony – while the heroines are not feminine in the traditional sense, they willingly and skilfully participate in action and adventure – they are still marked as feminine by their desire for beauty and adornment as well as their heterosexuality. Pierce’s texts widen the scope of the girls’ story and indeed expand what ‘femininity’ and being female entails – but they can only go so far. Girls can certainly be adventurous and courageous and even

violent – but they are still the feminine complement to the masculine males around them, all part of the binary system of gender.

Throughout this thesis, I will show how adult concern for ideological appropriateness in children's literature has continued to drive the production of children's literature; this concern is fuelled by the underlying and persistent belief that children are like imitators and sponges and will absorb whatever they are exposed to³⁰, including representations of gender difference and gender performance. This thesis will show how the tomboy figure in children's literature has been an important cultural marker of our evolving values; the figure of the tomboy has reflected adult conceptions of what is appropriate, normal and therefore *desirable*, in the representation of masculinity and femininity, gender and sexuality in children's literature.

³⁰ Sternheimer, Karen. *It's Not the Media: The Truth About Pop Culture's Influence on Children*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 2003, p.181.

Chapter One

The Ambivalence of Jo March: Exploring the Contradictory Possibilities in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*

My study of the tomboy in children's literature begins in the nineteenth century. Compared to twentieth century children's literature, the fiction produced for children in the nineteenth century appears overtly, and to some of us now, cloyingly didactic and moralistic. As documented by Kimberley Reynolds,^{1 2} it became common practice during the nineteenth century for separate texts, which included conduct books as well as fiction, to be produced for girls and for boys, each instructing its intended audience on good moral values as well as appropriate gendered behaviour. Foster and Simons write that

[c]onduct manuals and advice books of the time promoted the centrality of motherhood in the prevailing social order and the necessity for female self-sacrifice, service, and domestic responsibility, and these lessons were echoed in current literature for the young.³

¹ Reynolds, Kimberley. *Girls Only?: Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880–1910*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.

² In *What Katy Read: Feminist Re-Readings of 'Classic' Stories for Girls*, London: Macmillan, 1995, Shirley Foster and Judy Simons disagree with Reynolds' claim that juvenile books did not really emerge as a class until the 1880s with the growth of commercial publishing for the young and the general rise in literacy, p.2. They cite the work of Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs, who both show the existence of a gendered child audience in the early Victorian period. According to Foster and Simons, Briggs suggests that such "girls' fiction prioritises feminine experience and consequently (whether implicitly or explicitly) explores the possibilities of female self-expression and fulfillment in a male-dominated world".

³ Foster, S. and J. Simons. *What Katy Read*, pp.5-6.

Typically, in a girls' story, tomboyishness was depicted as a normal but temporary stage of girlhood, which was eventually grown out of. The *bildungsroman*, the "novel of education" or "novel of formation" was a popular form of narrative, and in the case of the girls' story, it showed the development of the main female character(s) from girlhood to womanhood, through a series of stages to maturity and self-knowledge⁴ which would usually be marked by marriage and/or motherhood. A significant proportion of the stories featuring a principal tomboy character would be focused on her rebellion against femininity and/or her struggles to perform the gendered behaviour expected of her, but by the conclusion, she would have learned to accept and perform femininity. In 1886, Edward Salmon summed up what girls' texts should accomplish:

Girls' literature performs one very useful function. It enables girls to read something above mere baby tales, and yet keeps them from the influence of novels of a sort which should be read only by persons capable of forming a discreet judgment.⁵

Furthermore, Salmon made the distinction between books for girls and books for boys:

Girls' literature ought to help build up women. If in choosing books that boys shall read it is necessary to remember that we are choosing mental food for the future chiefs of the race, it is equally important not to forget in

⁴ Foster, S. and J. Simons. *What Katy Read*, p.52.

⁵ Salmon, Edward. "What Girls Read", *Nineteenth Century*, vol. XX, no.116, 1886, p.522. Quoted in Foster, S. and J. Simons. *What Katy Read*, p. 1.

choosing books for girls that we are choosing mental food for the future
wives and mothers of that race.⁶

In being the source of “mental food” for future chiefs, wives and mothers (those categories in themselves reflect the subject matter of the gender-targeted books), books for children had a more serious and significant purpose besides entertainment. Accordingly, books for children reflected the ideologies of what constituted ‘normal’ and importantly, *desirable* male and female behaviour, ambitions, preoccupations, interests and temperament. Ann Scott MacLeod comments that the girls’ stories of nineteenth century America

were, typically, intensely domestic and interior. Where the boys’ books increasingly revolved around a young man’s encounter with the outside world – in the army, in the West, in the city – and around active, extroverted adventure, girls’ novels focused on character and relationships, as, of course, girls lives did as they approached womanhood.^{7 8}

Similarly, Julia Briggs points out the contrasting settings and virtues promoted in the books:

...during the early nineteenth century... stories for boys and girls now
began to be sharply differentiated: boys’ stories often involved travel to

⁶ “What Boys Read”, *Fortnightly Review*, 45, 1886, pp.248-59. Quoted in Showalter, Elaine, “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*” in *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp.50-51.

⁷ Quoted by Murphy, Ann B. “The Borders of the Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*.” *Signs* 15, no. 3, 1990, p.567.

⁸ And furthermore, Showalter writes, of the girls’ story, p.50: “Essentially moralistic, it was designed to bridge the gap between the schoolroom and the drawing room, to recommend docility, marriage, and obedience rather than autonomy or adventure”. In other words, daring adventure and conquest in “the great outdoors” and “new frontier” were for the boys.

far-flung places and advocated the less reflective virtues – courage, endurance, loyalty and patriotism. Stories for girls were typically set in the home and exemplified charity, kindness, patience and self-discipline, virtues which most girls had ample opportunity to practise.⁹

Among the most widely read and analysed of the girls' nineteenth century texts is Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women, or Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy*, which was first published in 1868. Alcott wrote three sequels: *Little Women, Part Second* (1869), followed by *Little Men: Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys* (1871), and finally, *Jo's Boys, and how they turned out* (1886).¹⁰ *Little Women* was solidly but not extraordinarily successful, selling 5,000 copies between its first publication and the publication of *Little Women, Part Second*.¹¹ The second part of the novel was a tremendous success, selling approximately 18,000 copies alone,¹² which in turn renewed interest in the first volume, which sold an additional 14,500 copies between April and December 1869¹³. *Little Women* has never been out of print

⁹ Briggs, Julia. "Women Writers and Writing for Children: From Sarah Fielding to E. Nesbit" in *Children and Their Books*, edited by Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p.238.

¹⁰ *Little Women, Part Second* is has been printed under different titles in Great Britain, including *Little Women Wedded*, *Little Women Married*, *Nice Wives* and *Good Wives* (see Elaine Showalter's *Notes on the Texts*, p.1079 in *Little Women, Little Men, Jo's Boys*. New York: Library of America, 2005). Both Parts of *Little Women* may be found as separate volumes, the first published as *Little Women* and the second often published as *Good Wives*. Numerous editions have both Parts published as single volume called *Little Women*, with no reference to the existence of two Parts. Many critics refer to both parts collectively as *Little Women*. Following The Library of America's 2005 edition of the texts (which I have used extensively in my research and the writing of this chapter), I will be referring to Parts I and II separately, as *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second*, and to the two other texts as *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*, rather than using the full titles under which they were originally published. Hence I may also refer to the four, rather than three, March texts.

¹¹ Myerson, Joel and Daniel Shealy. "The Sales of Louisa May Alcott's Books". *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 1990, p.69, as cited in Englund, Sheryl A. "Reading the Author in *Little Women*: A Biography of a Book." *American Transcendental Quarterly* 12, no. 3, 1998, p.205.

¹² Englund, S.A. "Reading the author in *Little Women*", pp.204-205.

¹³ Englund, S.A. "Reading the author in *Little Women*", p.205.

since its first publication. The March texts form the first set of ‘books in a series’ that I will be examining in this thesis.¹⁴

Much of the criticism of *Little Women* has focused on the autobiographical elements in the text, specifically, the parallels between Jo March and Alcott (reading Jo March as a direct representation of the author herself), and the March family as an idealised version of the Alcott family.¹⁵ Kim Wells argues that

Louisa Alcott used her writing, especially her fiction, as a constant process of interrogating and creating herself. She explored possible flawed and ideal feminine identities, both rejecting and admiring them.^{16 17}

My analysis of the tomboy in Alcott’s March texts will not be based on a reading of Jo March as Louisa May Alcott. I will, however, refer aspects of the texts’

¹⁴ Of the March texts, *Little Women* (usually including both Parts), has been the popular and canonised text, much read, analysed and criticised. *Little Men* and *Jo’s Boys* have not attracted the same critical attention. In this thesis, I have looked at tomboy characters within the context of the series they have appeared in, to highlight the ways in which these characters were portrayed, developed and transformed over the course of the series. As the story of Jo March continues beyond *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second*, into *Little Men* and *Jo’s Boys*, this chapter will focus on Jo March across all of the March texts.

¹⁵ The Alcott and March families both had four daughters, with the third dying in early adulthood. Sheryl A. Englund writes: “Alcott based Meg on her older sister, Anna Alcott Pratt, and (of course) Jo paralleled Alcott in the family structure. Gentle Elizabeth Sewall Alcott was *Little Women*’s Beth, and Abba May Alcott Nieriker (called May)... was the original of the artistic aspirant Amy”, from “Reading the author in *Little Women*”, p.203.

¹⁶ Wells, Kim. “Louisa May Alcott and the Roles of a Lifetime.” Masters Thesis, Southwest Texas State University, 1998. Accessed 30 August 2005.

<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/thesis.htm>.

¹⁷ Wells also suggests that especially since the publication of *Behind a Mask*, a collection of Alcott’s pseudonymous gothic fiction, many critics have argued for recognition of a duality in Alcott’s persona, an argument very similar to the approach taken by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Wells writes: “Gilbert and Gubar emphasize the idea that women writers’ personae and their novels’ characters are “doubled”; for instance, the “madwoman in the attic” reflects the repressed urges and desires of the innocent heroine of many typical nineteenth-century works”.

publication and the author's intentions and responses to her work, all of which contributed to the texts which were produced.

In the March texts, femininity and becoming a "little woman" are depicted as something that must be learned; they do not come naturally or easily to all girls, least of all the tomboy. Foster and Simons suggest that *Little Women* is

one of the first fictional texts for children to convey the difficulties and the anxieties of girlhood, and which suggests that becoming a 'little woman' is a learned and often fraught process, not an instinctual or natural condition of female development.¹⁸

In *Little Women*, femininity is not only learnable, it *must* be learned, *must* be adopted; it is the correct choice and normal for girls, as they grow up.¹⁹

A point that I will reinforce in this chapter and throughout the entire thesis is that the production²⁰ of children's literature is driven by a root ideology that requires texts for children to be "ideologically acceptable" – texts for children must convey responsible values and messages. The instruction may be explicit, that is, in the form of consciously embedded and deliberately constructed 'lessons', which are

¹⁸ Foster, S. and J. Simons. *What Katy Read*, p.87.

¹⁹ Karin Quimby suggests that the tomboy figure exposes gender as performance, and that categories such as masculine and feminine are "indeterminate and unstable" – see "The Story of Jo", p.1. I think there is no question that gender is performance, and Jo March is indeed a demonstration of this; however, I argue that in *Little Women*, the key message is that girls should, must, and will choose that "correct" performance. In the next chapter, I will discuss how Laura Ingalls in the Little House series learns to choose the correct gendered behaviour appropriate for the culture and communities in which she lives.

²⁰ My use of the term "production" includes authorship, editing, publication and in some cases which will be discussed in detail in this thesis, the official revision of texts.

easily identifiable. Such ‘lessons’ convey educational themes or examples of appropriate behaviour and/or morals. As indicated in the Introduction, Robert Sutherland calls this the *politics of advocacy*:

When advocacy is present, the authors tend to be aware of it. They generally know what they’re about and frame their characters and dramatize their themes to present their ideological concerns in the best and most persuasive light (sometimes, of course, through negative illustration, employing compelling contraries to “prove their case”). Frequently the politics of advocacy serves the aims of indoctrination, *urging* a particular value system or course of action, or attempting to enforce conformity to a set of behavioural norms; frequently it sets up attractive role models for the young, inducing admiration, and extolling certain values as virtues.²¹

The children’s text may have been written as a conscious reflection of what is considered (by author, editor, and publisher) as universally accepted reality, normativity and morality.²² So although the narrative may not be presented in lesson form, it still advocates, through the ideologies and values it conveys to its reader:

In essence, advocacy *seeks* to persuade readers of its ideology; to promote the authors’ world views and notions of what is or ought to be; *to influence readers’ thinking, feeling, and behaviour*.²³

²¹ Sutherland, Robert D. “Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children.” *Children’s Literature in Education* 16, no. 3, 1985, p.146.

²² And also *universally accepted forms of fantasy*. Fantasy worlds and characters in children’s texts are still based on universally accepted moralities, for example, the triumph of good over evil.

²³ Sutherland, R.D. “Hidden Persuaders”, p.147, my italics.

I argue, however, that although not all children's texts are driven by the politics of advocacy; that is, even if they do not deliberately and consciously advocate, they are still written to be ideologically acceptable – they still affirm accepted ideologies – they are normative. As I discussed in the Introduction, Sutherland calls this the politics of assent – “assent” being “an author's passive, unquestioning acceptance and internalization of an established ideology, which is then transmitted in the author's writing in an unconscious manner.”²⁴

The ideology subscribed to by the author through the politics of assent and therefore transmitted in his or her writing is “a set of values and beliefs widely held in the society at large which reflects the society's assumptions about what the world *is*”.²⁵ In children's literature, certain subjects are unequivocally taboo; we would not, for example, look in a children's text and expect to find bestiality. Underlying and driving such taboos are prevalent beliefs that 1) children are innocent until corrupted by external influences, including reading material; 2) this innocence of children should be protected and preserved; and 3) that “[a]dults tend to view children as imitators, sponges who soak up the language, behavior, and attitudes of the world around them”.²⁶ As the belief is that these innocent sponges *will* absorb, without resistance, inappropriate knowledge and unacceptable value systems if exposed to them, in the cause of preserving their innocence, children should not be exposed to such inappropriate knowledge and values. Of course, in the same way, it

²⁴ Sutherland, R.D. “Hidden Persuaders”, p.151.

²⁵ Sutherland, R.D. “Hidden Persuaders”, p.151.

²⁶ Sternheimer, Karen. *It's Not the Media: The Truth About Pop Culture's Influence on Children*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003, p.181.

is believed that the sponges will just as readily absorb appropriate, acceptable and good values – hence the need for instructive and ideologically acceptable content in children’s texts. In the girls’ story, the tomboy character herself demonstrates that tomboyishness is not acceptable as a permanent state.²⁷

The Tomboy’s Precursor

Before launching into a detailed analysis of Jo March, it is important to acknowledge a notable precursor: Ethel (full name Etheldred) May, in Charlotte M. Yonge’s *The Daisy Chain, or Aspirations*, first published in Britain in 1856.²⁸ Although she is never specifically identified in the text as a tomboy (she is neither named as one by the narrator nor is she described as thinking of herself in that way), Ethel exhibits typical markers of the tomboy. Femininity most definitely does not come naturally to Ethel, and she struggles to conform to what is expected of her. Ethel is constantly in trouble because of her appearance, reprimanded for having “mud-encrusted heels” and “draggled-tailed petticoats”. The family’s nurse is dismayed by the sight of her muddy boots, saying “Miss Ethel! Miss Ethel, you aren't going up with them boots on! I do declare you are just like one of the boys.

²⁷ Although children’s fiction is no longer as overtly didactic in tone as it used to be in the nineteenth century and before, it has not changed much in terms of the ideologically acceptable. True, we do have the category of young adult (YA) that is positioned between “children’s” or junior fiction (JF), and “adult” or in the library; YA fiction covers controversial topics that would be taboo in JF texts – homosexuality, mental illness, drug use (in the 1970s especially, the “Problem” novel became a very popular type of YA text) – this implies the acceptance of a kind of bridging category between the extremes of child and adult; on one extreme, the child must be protected from these sorts of topics; the young adult is exposed to some of these, but always, still, in a responsible, educational way (drug use is shown to be ‘bad’, rather than glamorous or routine), and of course, the adult, who is not protected as such. I discuss YA fiction further in Chapter Six.

²⁸ Alcott herself was familiar with Yonge’s work. In *Little Women*, for instance, she writes of Jo, sitting in the attic, eating apples and reading Yonge’s *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Karen Sands O’Connor demonstrates the parallels between the hero/heroine(s) of *Little Women* and *The Heir of Redclyffe* and uses them as the basis for her argument in her paper “Why Jo Didn’t Marry Laurie: Louisa May Alcott and the Heir of Redclyffe.” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 15, no. 1, 2004, pp.23-41.

And your frock!’” Ethel’s father, the widower Dr. May, scolds her, “‘Ethel, don't make such a figure of yourself. Those muddy ankles and petticoats are not fit to be seen--there, now you are sweeping the pavement...One would think you had never worn a gown in your life before!’”²⁹

Another marker of the tomboy is having interests that are deemed inappropriate for females; in Ethel’s case, she has a keen interest in classical studies. Only the May boys attend school; none of the girls are given the opportunity. But Ethel studies at home, using her brother Norman’s books to keep up with him academically. Her family are not at all pleased by this, and often express their concern over this inappropriate interest (especially her father, her eldest sister Margaret, and even Norman himself). For Ethel, this desire to pursue the academic is not a simple case of rebellion; she struggles inwardly, clearly troubled by her personal desire to study:

...she tried to work out the question in her own mind, whether her eagerness for classical learning was a wrong sort of ambition, to know what other girls did not, and whether it was right to crave for more knowledge than was thought advisable for her... though she was obliged to set to work so many principles and reflections to induce herself to wipe a pen, or to sit straight on her chair, that it was like winding up a steam-engine to thread a needle; yet the work was being done – she was

²⁹ All quotations from Yonge’s *The Daisy Chain* have been taken from the Project Gutenberg e-text No. 3610, 2001 [Originally published 1856], available online from <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/tdcoa11.txt>. As such, page numbers of quotations are not available.

struggling with her faults, humbled by them, watching them, and overcoming them.

In addition to her interest in classical studies, Ethel harbours a secret aspiration to write romances. This ambition to be a writer is one she shares with Jo March. Jo wants to “write books, and get rich and famous”³⁰. The major difference is that in *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second* Jo March does actually get some of her sensation stories published, and enjoys a degree of financial reward. Later on, in *Jo's Boys*, Jo becomes somewhat of a celebrity as a result of the popularity of a book she writes (but of course, this literary success only occurs after Jo has achieved the appropriate womanly milestones of marriage and motherhood).

Ethel's writing never crosses over the threshold of private activity into the public domain; her dreams of authorship are never fully realised. But although Ethel never fully indulges in her ‘inappropriate’ ambition, she is distracted by her reading when she is supposed to be looking after her baby brother Aubrey, and he almost burns himself at the fire due to her failure to watch him carefully. Her father chastises her, blaming her studies: "There's no bearing it! I'll put a stop to all schools and Greek, if it is to lead to this, and make you good for nothing!"

By the conclusion of *The Daisy Chain*, Ethel makes the decision to give up her studies and writing ambitions; she adopts the more appropriate and noble ambition of becoming the manager of the May household. She meets Norman

³⁰ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.154.

Ogilvie, to whom she is instantly attracted, but runs away from this potential romance, choosing instead to devote herself to the duty of looking after her family. Ethel's rejection of Norman Ogilvie raises questions, just as Jo March's choice to reject Laurie and marry Professor Bhaer does. Foster & Simons ask:

In resisting 'normal' female sexuality, and rejecting it for ethical criteria, is Ethel asserting her independence of conventional gendered behaviour or merely enacting another traditional female role, that of self abnegation? ...does Ethel's refusal to abandon her father, though a duty commonly assumed by Victorian daughters, indicate a refusal or inability to face the conditions, social and sexual, or mature adulthood?³¹

It is not just Ethel who learns, grows and develops through the course of *The Daisy Chain* – all nine May children (well, perhaps not baby Aubrey) have lessons to learn and personal weaknesses to overcome. Just as Alcott uses *Pilgrim's Progress* as a means to structure the didactic narrative and identify areas in need of personal development, Yonge uses a letter written by the late Mrs. May to an aunt prior to her death, which sets up the children's 'aspirations'. Mrs. May describes areas of each of her children's characters which they should aspire to improve. Of Ethel, for example, she writes:

...poor Ethel's old foibles, her harum-scarum nature, quick temper, uncouth manners, and heedlessness of all but one absorbing object, have kept her back, and caused her much discomfort; yet I sometimes think these manifest defects have occasioned a discipline that is the best thing for

³¹ S. Foster and J. Simons, *What Katy Read*, pp.81-82.

the character in the end. They are faults that show themselves, and which one can tell how to deal with, and I have full confidence that she has the principle within her that will conquer them.

Although Ethel's elder sister Flora is approved of as feminine ("...Flora knew that... she could not surpass Ethel in intellectual attainments, but *she was certainly far more valuable in the house*, and had been proved to have just the qualities in which her sister was most deficient..." [my emphasis]), she has some harsh lessons to learn herself, for she herself has inappropriate ambitions, becoming so obsessed with actively participating and succeeding in public/political life with her husband that she leaves her baby in the hands of an incompetent nurse, leading to its tragic death.

Although to us ambition that leads to the neglect of one's baby is a far greater fault than an inability to keep one's petticoats clean, Foster and Simons suggest that domesticity is prioritised in *The Daisy Chain* as an important attribute of femininity:

Despite her deficiencies, Flora has many admirable qualities, and her neatness and household efficiency are set against Ethel's untidiness, carelessness and practical ineptitude; a mark of the latter's spiritual progress is her physical transformation into a well-kept woman who can now make tea for the family without getting into a complete tangle over it...³²

³² S. Foster and J. Simons, *What Katy Read*, p.75.

In comparison, when we meet Jo March for the first time in *Little Women*, she is described thus:

Fifteen-year-old Jo was very tall, thin, and brown, and reminded one of a colt; for she never seemed to know what to do with her long limbs, which were very much in her way. She had a decided mouth, a comical nose, and sharp, grey eyes, which appeared to see everything, and were by turns fierce, funny, or thoughtful. Her long, thick hair was her one beauty; but it was usually bundled into a net to be out of her way. Round shoulders had Jo, big hands and feet, a fly-away look to her clothes, and the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman, and didn't like it.³³

This description of Jo suggests a character not yet settled in her own body, not fully comfortable with or in control of her physical appearance. This is a physical reflection of where Jo is in life – she is in a transitional phase, still developing and incomplete, not having reached her full potential. The March texts, mainly *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second*, trace her journey towards becoming a woman and reaching the point of completeness that comes with maturity.

Jo uses slang, much to the disapproval of her sisters, especially Meg and Amy. She is dissatisfied with being a girl, unable to join her father, who is fighting in the war; and she is uncomfortable and dissatisfied with what is expected of her, as a girl and as part of becoming a woman. When told sternly by Meg that she

³³ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.10.

should remember that she is a young lady and ought to behave better, Jo responds vehemently:

‘I’m not! and if turning up my hair makes me one, I’ll wear it in tow tails till I’m twenty,’ cried Jo, pulling off her net and shaking down a chestnut mane. “I hate to think I’ve got to grow up and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China-aster. It’s bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boys’ games and work and manners. I can’t get over my disappointment in not being a boy, and it’s worse than ever now, for I’m dying to go and fight with papa, and I can only stay at home and knit, like a poky old woman!’³⁴

Jo has lofty ambitions – she wants to do “something very splendid; what it was she had no idea as yet”.³⁵ The “something very splendid” is really anything other than what she would be expected to do as a woman. Even now, not officially a woman yet, Jo “found her greatest affliction in the fact that she couldn’t read, run, and ride as much as she liked”.³⁶ She recognises that as she gets older, she will be expected to show more self-restraint and behave in more docile, domesticated ways, and does not welcome the prospect. She likes being outdoors, and going for walks, even in horrid weather, telling Meg ““Can’t keep still all day, and, not being a pussy-cat, I don’t like to doze by the fire. I like adventures, and I’m going to find some’”.³⁷ Jo wants her life to be something different to what seems predetermined for girls – something beyond growing up and becoming a lady, a wife and mother.

³⁴ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.9.

³⁵ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.46.

³⁶ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.46.

³⁷ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.54.

Many lessons are learned by Jo as she develops into a 'little woman'. When she tries to cook dinner for guests, Jo learns that "something more than energy and good-will is necessary to make a cook".³⁸ Jo's dinner party efforts prove to be a disaster. She boils the asparagus so hard that their heads fall off, she burns the bread black, serves up lumpy blancmange and the strawberries have been salted instead of sugared, and the cream she serves with them has soured.³⁹ The kitchen is the location of more than one lesson, and for girls/young women other than Jo. In *Little Women, Part Second*, newly married Meg also learns a lesson, when her attempts to make currant jelly result prove a messy failure and result in a quarrel with her husband. In *Little Men*, Meg's daughter, Jo's niece Daisy also learns in a 'kitchen', playing Patty Pans with her Aunt Jo.⁴⁰ Daisy learns that cooking is a skill that must be learned through practice when her first enthusiastic attempts at cooking are less than successful.

One of the lessons most analysed by critics is Jo's on controlling her anger, detailed in the chapter entitled "Jo Meets Apollyon". When Jo refuses to allow Amy to accompany her and Laurie to the theatre, Amy takes revenge by burning the only copy of Jo's painstakingly handwritten manuscript of original stories. Upon discovering what Amy has done, "Jo's hot temper mastered her, and she shook Amy till her teeth chattered in her head, crying in a passion of grief and anger . . ."⁴¹ The

³⁸ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.125.

³⁹ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, pp.125-126.

⁴⁰ As previously cited, detailed in "Patty Pans" (Chapter V), in Alcott, L. M. *Little Men*, pp.571-587.

⁴¹ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.83.

intensity of Jo's rage at the destruction of her work is not really inappropriate; after all, the narrator tells us

Jo's book was the pride of her heart, and was regarded by her family as a literary sprout of great promise. It was only half a dozen little fairy tales, but Jo had worked over them patiently, putting her whole heart into her work, hoping to make something good enough to print. She had just copied them with great care, and had destroyed the old manuscript, so that Amy's bonfire had consumed the loving work of several years.⁴²

When Amy goes after Jo and Laurie who have gone ice-skating, to try and make amends, Jo, still bitter and unable to forgive her sister, ignores Amy and fails to warn her that some of the ice is too thin to safely skate over – and of course, Amy falls through the ice into the freezing water. After Amy's dramatic rescue, Jo is overcome by feelings of guilt and self-recrimination. She confides, ashamed, to her mother, “‘It seems as if I could do anything when I’m in a passion; I get so savage, I could hurt someone and spoil my life and make everybody hate me’”.⁴³ Marmee's response is one that has been much critiqued; she reveals to Jo that she, too, is angry every day:

‘I’ve been trying to cure it for forty years, and have only succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo; but I have learned not to show it; and I still hope to learn not to feel it, though it may take me another forty years to do so’.⁴⁴

⁴² Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.83.

⁴³ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.89.

⁴⁴ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.89.

Marmee tells Jo that Mr. March has helped her to learn to control her anger:

‘He never loses patience – never doubts or complains – but always hopes, and works, and waits so cheerfully that one is ashamed to do otherwise before him. He helped and comforted me, and showed me that I must try to practise all the virtues I would have my little girls possess, for I was their example’.⁴⁵

Her advice to Jo is to ““keep watch over your “bosom enemy””,⁴⁶ and to ““try with heart and soul to master this quick temper, before it brings you greater sorrow and regret than you have known to-day””.⁴⁷ Comforted and inspired by her mother’s words, Jo says a prayer, “for in that sad, yet happy hour, she had learned not only the bitterness of remorse and despair, but the sweetness of self-denial and self-control...”⁴⁸ In her analysis of this episode, Stephanie Foote suggests that

...this rich scene is never critiqued in its entirety; the events leading up to Jo and her mother’s discussion of anger and repression are generally ignored... we miss something when we ignore such scenes in order to focus on how the novel seems to tell its readers that women must not have, much less act on, negative emotions.⁴⁹

Foote goes on to assert that while it is true that Amy’s skating accident prompts Jo to fear that she will do something terrible, it is also true (and I think strangely ignored by many critics as well as within the text itself) that Amy has already flown

⁴⁵ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.90.

⁴⁶ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.90.

⁴⁷ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.91.

⁴⁸ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.92.

⁴⁹ Foote, Stephanie, “Resentful Little Women.” *College Literature* 31, no. 1, 2005, p.65.

into a “passion” in which she did something hurtful and dreadful. But somehow, it is Jo, not Amy (and certainly not *both of them*) who agonises over “making everybody hate” her, and it is Amy, not Jo, who is the final victim in this scenario.⁵⁰

Ann B. Murphy also analyses this episode, suggesting that the importance of Jo’s book is diminished, thereby diminishing also the justification for her angry response to Amy’s actions:

When Amy burns Jo’s much-cherished manuscript, Jo is quite naturally furious – and thus guilty of being quick-tempered. Yet even Jo refers to the manuscript as her “little book”, while the narrator explains that “it was only half a dozen little fairy tales... [and] it seemed a small loss to others”. Later, Meg advises Amy on how to make up with Jo, telling her ‘You *were* very naughty, and it *is* hard to forgive the loss of her precious little book’, suggesting by her emphasis that Amy was not very naughty and that the little book was not so precious. While the cause of Jo’s impermissible anger is ruthlessly minimized, the consequences are nonetheless enormous – and deadly: Amy falls through the ice and nearly drowns.⁵¹

In the nineteenth century girls’ story, the tomboy is a girl in a state of transition, learning to overcome her tomboyishness. She is a girl who by definition *must* change her behaviour and temperament. And so, although both sisters have expressed their anger in active and intense ways, the lesson is focused on Jo, the tomboy sister, the sister marked as flawed.

⁵⁰ Foote, S. “Resentful Little Women”, p.64.

⁵¹ Murphy, A.B. “The Borders of the Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*”, p.572.

Jo March: instructive *and* subversive

Little Women's narrative structure refers to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678); this highlights the moral and self-developmental focus of the novel. Chapter titles make direct allusions to *Pilgrim's Progress*: "Meg Goes to Vanity Fair", "Jo Meets Apollyon", "Amy's Valley of Humiliation", "Beth Finds the Palace Beautiful"; each of these chapters features a key lesson learned by each of the March sisters. The girls "play pilgrim", and a chapter is even called "Burdens".⁵² It is easy to read the text now, identify the lessons learned by the March sisters and see the text as a purely didactic text; however, some critics have suggested that Alcott subverts some of the conventional 'messages' of the nineteenth century girl's story. Ann B. Murphy asks, for example:

Is *Little Women* adolescent, sentimental, and repressive, an instrument for teaching girls how to become "little," domesticated, and silent? Is the novel subversive, matriarchal, and implicitly revolutionary, fostering discontent with the very model of female domesticity it purports to admire?⁵³

These opposing readings offer contradictory possibilities that are equally compelling. Murphy goes on to suggest that there can be no "rigid" answers to her questions, and I agree. According to Murphy, *Little Women* "preaches domestic containment and Bunyanesque self-denial while it explores the infinity of inward female space and suggests unending rage against the cultural limitations imposed on

⁵² Showalter, Elaine. "*Little Women*: The American Female Myth", p.52.

⁵³ Murphy, A.B. "The Borders of the Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*", p.564.

female development”⁵⁴; she suggests that it is “these tensions and ambivalences” that “contribute to the power of *Little Women*.”⁵⁵ The tomboy character of Jo March provides the critical reader with contradictory possibilities to explore; her story may be interpreted as positive and empowering, and yet it may also be read as self-negating and stifling. On one hand, it can be argued that *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second* in particular tell the story of the feminization, domestication and silencing of Jo March the tomboy. At the start of the series, Jo March is an exuberant teenager, an aspiring writer, passionately creative, and gracelessly outspoken; by the end of the series Jo is virtually unrecognisable, playing multiple feminine roles: wife (Mrs. Jo), aunt (Aunt Jo) and mother (Mother Bhaer). Although Jo appears contentedly settled in her maternal, nurturing role, this is an outcome which the ambitious and undomesticated Jo March would have never envisaged for herself, and we the readers today would have never chosen for her.⁵⁶ On the other hand, if we focus on the tomboy’s feelings, passions, actions, talents and dreams, in the part of *Little Women* which Karin Quimby calls “the far naughtier beginning and middle of the narrative”⁵⁷ and set aside her fate for a moment, it could well be argued that Jo’s tomboyish exuberance, her rebellion

⁵⁴ Murphy, A.B. “The Borders of the Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*”, p.565.

⁵⁵ Murphy, A.B. “The Borders of the Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*”, p.567.

⁵⁶ But of course, it is worth acknowledging that many of Alcott’s readers were keen to see the March sisters marry. Showalter writes in “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, p.54, that “[Alcott] was annoyed when girls wrote to her to ask ‘who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman’s life’”. This provides an example of the point made by Foster and Simons as mentioned in the Introduction: “Textual elements which today may appear to indicate a particular reaction to contemporary ideologies will have had different meanings for the audience of the time”, *What Katy Read*, p.xii [Preface]. We may now be disappointed and left unsatisfied by the marriage of Jo March, but for many readers in Alcott’s time, Jo’s marriage was no doubt the first expected step in a “happy ever after” ending. This example illustrates precisely how a reader’s temporal position can have a significant bearing on the reading(s) produced.

⁵⁷ Quimby, K. “The Story of Jo”, p.4.

against the gendered behaviour expected of her, her gender-bending and intensely active roles in the family theatricals, her passionate pursuit of literary and financial success, all throw into question the ideals of femininity, domesticity, passivity and womanliness that the text supposedly presents as the correct and ultimate goal for its readers. Perhaps by example in the “naughtier” parts of the narrative of *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second*, Jo March the tomboy plays a subversive as well as instructive role. It is arguable that although in the end Jo March acquiesces to society’s standards of womanliness and sacrifices her literary aspirations to open a school for boys with her husband, it is through her bumpy journey, through the process of first being her naturally exuberant self, learning from experience and in the end, ‘becoming’ a woman, that the character of Jo March raises questions about the limitations of her gender. Jo March dares to dream of an alternative future and verbalises other possibilities for a young, creative woman. Karin Quimby suggests that “[b]y refusing to learn and enact femininity, the tomboy destabilises gender as a ‘natural’ construct”.⁵⁸ However, if we read all four March texts, we see that Jo March does, in the end, “learn and enact femininity”. She even assists in teaching femininity in *Little Men*, playing “Patty Pans” with her niece Daisy,⁵⁹ and taking on the wild “Naughty Nan” Harding – of Nan, Jo tells her husband: ““She is full of spirits, and only needs to be taught what to do with them to be as nice a little girl as Daisy””.⁶⁰ I do not dispute the destabilization of “gender as a ‘natural’ construct”, but the key point here is that by the end of the series, Jo March *has* adopted that

⁵⁸ Quimby, K. “The Story of Jo”, p.2.

⁵⁹ Alcott, Louisa May. “Patty Pans” (Chapter V), in *Little Men*, pp.571-587, from *Little Women, Little Men, Jo's Boys*. New York: Library of America, 2005.

⁶⁰ Alcott, L. M. *Little Men*, pp.605-606.

construct, and has successfully given up her tomboyish ways. Which is the more memorable – the process or the conclusion?

Foster and Simons suggest that

Little Women then maintains an uneasy equilibrium between the fantasies of rebellion it dramatizes and the moral message it claims to promote. Whilst on the one hand it endorses Jo March's defiance of the womanly, and invites support for a reinterpretation of women's roles generally, it also reinscribes the traditional myths of femininity in its valuation of the ideals erected by the patriarchal order: motherhood, marriage and the values of home.⁶¹

My assertion is that Jo March is an ambivalent figure in a series of ambivalent texts that play a delicate balancing act between questioning/subversion and maintaining ideological acceptability as a girl's text. Foster and Simons suggest that despite "the fantasies of independence that the novel licences, self-assertion ultimately cannot prosper".⁶² *Exactly!* As texts written for young girls in the nineteenth century, the questioning of gender roles could be framed only within certain boundaries. Although Jo March could dream of a "Castle in the Air" with an abundance of Arabian steeds, piles of books and a magic inkstand, Louisa May Alcott could not write her heroine a fate as a literary spinster.

⁶¹ S. Foster and J. Simons, *What Katy Read*, p.99.

⁶² S. Foster and J. Simons, *What Katy Read*, p.103.

The Silencing of Jo March: The Self-Expression and Ambition of the Tomboy

Outspokenness is an attribute associated with the tomboy, and it is treated as a character fault rather than an asset. The silencing of Jo March occurs in a number of ways, through her speech and her writing; learning to be self-silencing (which includes learning when to speak as well as what words to speak) is a marker of a tomboy's progress towards womanhood and femininity. Jo's mother Marmee exemplifies self-silencing with her admission that she is angry every day, but has learned to control it.

In the chapter entitled "Calls" in *Little Women, Part Second*, Jo reluctantly accompanies Amy as she makes calls ("She hated calls of the formal sort, and never made any till Amy compelled her with a bargain, bribe, or promise"⁶³). When advised by Amy, "'Don't make any of your abrupt remarks, or do anything odd... Just be calm, cool and quiet – that's safe and ladylike...for fifteen minutes'",⁶⁴ Jo decides to make a mockery of the social niceties she is supposed to observe: "naughty Jo took her at her word; for, during the first call, she sat ...as silent as a sphinx"⁶⁵ The result is a pronouncement by one of the ladies that "that oldest Miss March" is "a haughty, uninteresting creature". Jo finds this funny, but Amy is disgusted at her sister's behaviour. For the next visit, Jo assures Amy that she will imitate the behaviour of "'a charming girl'".⁶⁶ The result is an overly talkative Jo embarrassing Amy, "making more droll revelations and committing still more

⁶³ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.306.

⁶⁴ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.308.

⁶⁵ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.309.

⁶⁶ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.309.

fearful blunders”.⁶⁷ She unintentionally insults Miss Lamb, and, when saying good-bye very obviously parodies May Chester’s “gushing style”. Afterwards, Jo sees nothing wrong with her behaviour; she was just being honest and amusing: ““They know we are poor, so it’s no use pretending that we have grooms, buy three or four hats a season, and have things as easy and fine as they do””; Amy, however, is mortified, and chastises her sister: ““You needn’t...expose our poverty in that perfectly unnecessary way. You haven’t a bit of proper pride, and will never learn when to hold your tongue and when to speak””,⁶⁸ Furthermore, Amy tells Jo, ““Women should learn to be agreeable, particularly poor ones; for they have no other way of repaying the kindnesses they receive””.⁶⁹

But Jo’s refusal to conform results in more serious consequences than Amy’s embarrassment when Jo and Amy visit two of their Aunts. The narrator tells us, “By her next speech, Jo deprived herself of several years of pleasure, and received a timely lesson in the art of holding her tongue”.⁷⁰ While Amy expresses her willingness to work at the Chesters’ fair (““I think it is very kind of them to let me share the labour and the fun””), Jo however does not hesitate to express her air of cynicism towards such fairs: ““I hate to be patronised, and the Chesters think it’s a great favour to allow us to help with their highly connected fair... they only want you to work””. Jo tells Aunt March and Aunt Carroll, ““I don’t like favors; they oppress and make me feel like a slave. I’d rather do everything for myself, and be

⁶⁷ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.310.

⁶⁸ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.312.

⁶⁹ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, pp.314-315.

⁷⁰ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, pp.316-317.

perfectly independent””.⁷¹ When the sisters are asked about their ability to speak French, Amy answers in the affirmative, thanking Aunt March for letting her maid Esther converse in French with her. Jo, on the other hand, responds brusquely and negatively, ““Don’t know a word; I’m very stupid about studying anything; can’t bear French, it’s such a slippery, silly sort of language””.⁷² Even when saying goodbye, Jo “shook hands in a gentlemanly manner”, while Amy is much more affectionate and endearing, and “kissed both the aunts”.⁷³ Not surprisingly, Jo fails to impress the Aunts, and it is Amy who is invited to accompany Aunt Carroll to Europe. Jo, who has always wished to travel, is bitterly disappointed. Her mother, however tells her the reason for her not being chosen for the trip: ““When aunt spoke to me the other day, she regretted your blunt manners and too independent spirit””.⁷⁴ Jo regrets her behaviour instantly, once it has been pointed out to her: ““Oh, my tongue, my abominable tongue! Why can’t I learn to keep it quiet?”” groaned Jo, remembering words which had been her undoing.”⁷⁵

According to Ann B. Murphy, *Little Women* “consistently devalues Jo’s public voice, while her private writing, especially when it contains self-correction

⁷¹ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.317.

⁷² Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.317.

⁷³ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.318.

⁷⁴ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.328.

⁷⁵ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.328. A harsh punishment for Jo to learn, but missing out on a trip of a lifetime is nowhere as harsh as the punishment of 17th and 18th century Quaker women via the device known as the scold’s bridle or brank. This device was designed to provide a mirror punishment by which, Michael Kerrigan writes, “headstrong women , or ‘shrews’, were tamed...”. The women were punished in this manner as a consequence of their preaching in the streets, “giving offence both by their unfeminine behaviour and their doctrinal message... The branks consisted of an iron muzzle with an iron plate specifically designed to hold down the tongue... The tongue plate was often fitted with sharp, downward-thrusting spikes capable of inflicting agonizing pain at the slightest movement of the tongue or jerk of the halter”. *The Instruments of Torture*. Staplehurst, Kent: Spellmount, 2001, p.34.

and criticism, is permitted”⁷⁶; Murphy cites the following example: “Rather than supporting her family with her skills as a professional writer, Jo is forced into the self-destructive sacrifice of selling her hair to raise money for her father”.⁷⁷ And when Jo’s sensation story wins \$100, her father does not praise her and really does not seem all that pleased for her; instead telling her, ““You can do better than this, Jo. Aim at the highest, and never mind the money””.⁷⁸ Jo uses the money she earns from writing romances to send Marmee and the sickly Beth away for a month or two by the seaside.⁷⁹ She enjoys the satisfaction of being able to provide for her family:

[She] began to feel herself a power in the house; for by the magic of a pen, her ‘rubbish’ turned into comforts for them all. ‘The Duke’s Daughter’ paid the butcher’s bill. ‘A Phantom Hand’ put down a new carpet, and the ‘Curse of the Coventrys’ proved the blessing of the Marches in the way of groceries and gowns.⁸⁰

However, Jo’s sensation fiction is portrayed negatively in *Little Women, Part Second*. While living in New York with the Kirkes, motivated by “a dream of filling the home with comforts, giving Beth everything she wanted, from strawberries in winter to an organ in her bedroom”⁸¹ Jo begins writing sensation stories for the *Weekly Volcano*. This enterprise proves a lucrative one, but Jo keeps these stories a

⁷⁶ Murphy, A.B. “The Borders of the Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*”, p.581.

⁷⁷ Murphy, A.B. “The Borders of the Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*”, p.581.

⁷⁸ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.286

⁷⁹ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, pp.286-287.

⁸⁰ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.287.

⁸¹ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.367.

secret from her parents, fearing their disapproval. Unfortunately for Jo, in the course of carrying out research for these thrilling tales, according to the narrator, she begins to corrupt her own morality:

Eager to find material for stories, and bent on making them original in plot, if not masterly in execution, she searched newspapers for accidents, incidents and crimes; she excited the suspicions of public librarians by asking for works on poisons; she studied faces in the street, and characters, good, bad, and indifferent, all about her; she delved in the dust of ancient times for facts or fictions so old that they were as good as new, and introduced herself to folly, sin, and misery, as well as her limited opportunities allowed. She thought she was prospering finely; but, unconsciously, she was beginning to desecrate some of the womanliest attributes of a woman's character.⁸²

Foster and Simons argue that

[l]iterary creation is Jo's only outlet for the passionate and rebellious elements of her nature, and while the writing of thrillers is seen as acceptable as a stage in adolescent development, or a genre that is appropriate for men rather than women, once Jo approaches adulthood she must case aside such delinquent tendencies... the subversive impulses that Jo satisfies through her writing are incompatible with the contemporary versions of selfhood for women, where anger must be kept hidden and a silent conformism cultivated.⁸³

⁸² Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.371.

⁸³ Foster, S. and J. Simons. *What Katy Read*, pp.98-99.

So while it may have been more acceptable for Jo to ‘play’ at writing romances and sensation fiction as a girl, entering competitions and getting the odd story published, as a young woman the interest goes beyond ‘pastime’ and becomes ‘profession’. Writing for the *Weekly Volcano*, Jo churns out product in regular supply and has to actively and intensively carry out research to achieve this.

Many readers’ animosity towards Professor Bhaer, Jo’s eventual husband, is due to his harsh criticism of people (which includes Jo) who write sensation fiction, and his negation of an activity at which we the readers can see Jo is clearly skilled, and for which she has been financially rewarded. He tells Jo, “‘I would more rather give my boys gunpowder to play with than this bad trash’”.⁸⁴ When Jo tries to suggest that respectable people can make an honest living out of writing sensation stories, the Professor responds:

‘There is a demand for whiskey, but I think you and I do not care to sell it.

If the respectable people knew what harm they did, they would not feel that the living *was* honest. They haf no right to put poison in the sugar-plum, and let the small ones eat it. No; they should think a little, and sweep mud in the street before they do this thing’.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.377.

⁸⁵ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p. 377. Professor Bhaer’s attitude towards the consumption and sale of alcohol reflects that of the temperance movement; the American Temperance Society was particularly active during the 1830s to mid-1850s (although Professor Bhaer may be ahead of his time, his attitude seems more suggestive of Prohibition than temperance and moderation!). See “Industrialization and the war on alcohol” in *The Control of Fuddle and Flash: A Sociological History of the Regulation of Alcohol and Opiates* by Jan-Willem Gerritsen. Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2000, pp.141-187, for analysis of the origins of the anti-alcohol movements and development of drinking patterns in the nineteenth century, as related to the process and effects of widescale industrialisation in the United States, Britain and the Netherlands.

Jo is shamed by the Professor's words; by now he is a friend whose opinions and knowledge she admires. As a result of this conversation with her friend, Jo is driven to do something that she was once so angry with Amy for doing – she burns her manuscripts. Furthermore, Jo vows never to write sensation fiction again. She then tries to write a moralistic story, but finds there is no market for it; when she tries to write a children's story, she finds the conventions she needs to write to are not agreeable to her:

But much as she liked to write for children, Jo could not consent to depict all her naughty boys as being eaten by bears or tossed by mad bulls, because they did not go to a particular Sabbath-school, nor all the good infants, who did go, as rewarded by every kind of bliss, from gilded gingerbread to escorts of angels, when they departed this life with psalms or sermons on their lisping tongues.⁸⁶

In the final chapter of *Little Women, Part Second*, as the Marches reflect on their “Castles in the Air” and their lives now, Jo says:

‘I haven’t given up the hope that I may write a good book yet, but I can wait, and I’m sure it will be all the better for such experiences and illustrations as these,’ and Jo pointed from the lively lads in the distance to her father, leaning on the Professor’s arm...and then to her mother, sitting enthroned among her daughters, with their children in her lap and at her feet...⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p. 379.

⁸⁷ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p. 515.

Family is Jo's new priority for which she has chosen not to write for the time being. She also expresses a belief that her writing will be enriched by her experiences in her new roles, as a wife and mother. In *Little Men*, as Mother Bhaer, Jo does write, not feverishly, ambitiously and self-indulgently in a garret as she used to, but calmly and instructively, in a thick book she calls her "conscience book". This book is a weekly record of each boy's progress, good or bad; it is a teaching tool, for on "Sunday night I show him the record. If it is bad I am sorry and disappointed, if it is good I am glad and proud; but, whichever it is, the boys know I want to help them".⁸⁸ This new writing is not for entertainment or lurid thrills and is not exchanged for money, but forms the part of the moral education of the boys of Plumfield School. The entries in the conscience book are not written by an aspiring author, but a mother and responsible instructor of young people.

In *Jo's Boys*, however, Jo takes up creative writing once again, this time with great success. Described in the chapter entitled "Jo's Last Scrape", her writing success is described as the greatest surprise of all in the March family's time when, "Jo's wildest and most cherished dream actually came true".⁸⁹ It is only after a long period of illness and confinement that a desperate Jo "fell back upon the long-disused pen as the only thing she could do to help fill up the gaps in the income".⁹⁰ In other words, necessity is what motivates Jo to write again, not ambition. Jo takes on a project that sounds very similar to that which Alcott undertook in writing *Little Women*:

⁸⁸ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.546.

⁸⁹ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.834.

⁹⁰ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.834.

A book for girls being wanted by a certain publisher, she hastily scribbled a little story describing a few scenes and adventures in the lives of herself and sisters, though boys were more in her line, and with very slight hopes of success sent it out to seek its fortune.⁹¹

For Jo, it is not fame that brings the greatest joy, but “the power of making her mother’s last years happy and serene... as a girl, Jo’s favourite plan had been a room where Marmee could sit in peace and enjoy herself after her hard, heroic life”; Jo’s new literary success makes “the dream...a happy fact”.⁹² Jo’s pleasure is not from public attention and accolades, the fulfilment of a thirst for fame or even material gain, but the pleasure gained from providing for others. The difference between providing for Marmee now and providing for Beth in *Little Women, Part Second* is that Jo is no longer writing sensation fiction, but girl’s fiction, a more morally acceptable activity.

“Jo’s Last Scrape” details the demands of celebrity now imposed upon Jo, who is hounded by reporters and fans, all eager for autographs, interviews and favours. Although as a girl Jo craved fame, grown-up Jo is irritated by the constant attention of strangers; the chapter shows the (often comical) lengths to which she will go to avoid having to perform celebrity. The triumphant re-emergence of Jo the

⁹¹ Alcott, L.M. *Jo’s Boys*, p.834. Alcott herself wrote of writing *Little Women*, “I plod away, though I don’t enjoy this sort of thing. Never liked girls, or knew many, except my sisters; but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting, though I doubt it”. Cheney, Ednah, *Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters and Journals*. Boston: Roberts Bros., 1889, pp.198-199. Quoted by Showalter, E. in “*Little Women*: The American Female Myth”, p.50.

⁹² Alcott, L.M. *Jo’s Boys*, p.835.

writer is limited to this chapter, with the rest of *Jo's Boys* devoted mainly to the stories of the boys and girls of Plumfield.

As a tomboy, Jo's ambition, like her outspokenness, is a sign of her immaturity. She is resistant to the 'normal' pathways that girls take. She wants to be something 'better', something 'else'. Until she has found her authentic calling, Jo the writer cannot be successful. The tomboy is silenced; the woman who is no longer a tomboy becomes a role model for children. Jo only finds the kind of success she once longed for long after she has given up that dream as a mature woman, a wife, and a mother.

The Reluctant Match-Maker: The Controversial Marriage of Jo March

When Meg, the first-married March sister tells Jo, on the topic of marriage:

'It's just what you need to bring out the tender, womanly half of your nature, Jo. You are like a chestnut-burr, prickly on the outside, but silky-soft within, and a sweet kernel, if one can only get at it. Love will make you show your heart some day, and then the rough burr will fall off'.⁹³

Jo's response to this is an interesting one: "'Frost opens chestnut burrs, ma'am, and it takes a good shake to bring them down. Boys go nutting, and I don't care to be bagged by them'".⁹⁴ Just as she is uncomfortable with her own physicality, tomboy Jo is not comfortable with the idea of marriage and love (and the unmentioned

⁹³ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.460.

⁹⁴ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.460.

sexuality). She is disgusted when she witnesses affection between John Brooke and Meg for the first time. Facing the prospect of Meg's engagement, she confides in her mother, "I just wish I could marry Meg myself, and keep her safe in the family".⁹⁵ Jo's statements are an expression of her uneasiness towards the prospect growing up; her sister will marry and go away, changing the family dynamic forever, and her own sense of independence is threatened by the possibility of being "bagged" by a boy.

At the age of twenty-five in *Little Women, Part Second*, Jo realises that with Beth gone, Meg married and Amy away in Europe (on the trip Jo missed out on as a result of her own words), that she is all alone. She resigns herself to a future alone as a literary spinster:

An old maid, that's what I'm to be. A literary spinster, with a pen for a spouse, a family of stories for children, and twenty years hence a morsel of fame, perhaps; when, like poor Johnson, I'm old, and can't enjoy it, solitary, and can't share it, independent, and don't need it. Well, I needn't be a sour saint nor a selfish sinner; and, I dare say, old maids are very comfortable when they get used to it...⁹⁶

Little Women features a minor character named Miss Crocker, who is a spinster. Privately referred to as "Croaker" by the March girls, Miss Crocker is portrayed as a most unappealing and unlikable character, described by the narrator as a "thin, yellow spinster, with a sharp nose and inquisitive eyes, who saw everything and

⁹⁵ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.212.

⁹⁶ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.466.

gossiped about all she saw”.⁹⁷ Miss Crocker invites herself to Jo’s disastrous dinner party, and poor Jo knows full well that Miss Crocker’s “tattling tongue” will report the failures of the evening “far and wide”.⁹⁸ And after criticising and complaining throughout the disaster, we are told at the conclusion of the dinner, “Miss Crocker made ready to go, being eager to tell the new story at another friend's dinner table”.

In *Little Women*, Marmee does tell Jo that a good marriage is far more important than a rich one; although John Brooke is poor, Marmee is “content to see Meg begin humbly, for if I am not mistaken, she will be rich in the possession of a good man's heart, and that is better than a fortune”.⁹⁹ When Meg worries that “poor girls don’t stand a chance...unless they put themselves forward”, Marmee advises Meg and Jo:

‘Better be happy old maids than unhappy wives, or unmaidenly girls, running about to find husbands... Don't be troubled, Meg, poverty seldom daunts a sincere lover. Some of the best and most honoured women I know were poor girls, but so love-worthy that they were not allowed to be old maids’.¹⁰⁰

So although Marmee tells the girls it is better to be “happy old maids than unhappy wives”, we could deduce from Marmee’s advice to the girls that it is only the *non-love-worthy* girls that will be allowed to be old maids – in other words, the girls *not worthy of love* will be the old maids. After Jo’s gloomy thoughts on the prospect of

⁹⁷Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.125.

⁹⁸Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.126.

⁹⁹Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.213.

¹⁰⁰Alcott, L.M. *Little Women*, p.110.

her own spinsterhood, the narrator urges the readers to treat spinsters with kindness and consideration:

Don't laugh at the spinsters, dear girls, for often very tender, tragic romances are hidden away in the hearts that beat so quietly under the sober... Gentlemen, which means boys, be courteous to the old maids, no matter how poor and plain and prim...¹⁰¹

The whole tone of this speech on spinsters suggests pity. The readers are advised to be kind to the poor old spinsters, “the sad, sour sisters” who “have missed the sweetest part of life”. We could feel very sorry for Miss Crocker, secretly sad and outwardly sour as a result of having missed “the sweetest part of life”. Indeed, although the March girls dislike Miss Crocker, “they had been taught to be kind to her, simply because she was old and poor and had few friends”.¹⁰² Whether spinsters were non-love-worthy girls to begin with, or became non-love-worthy women because of their spinsterhood, becoming a spinster is not a positive prospect in both parts of *Little Women*. Jo’s self-reflection on being alone and her resolve to become a literary spinster is melancholy rather than hopeful. This all suggests that despite what appear to be positive perspectives on spinsterhood, the narrator and Marmee actually suggest that spinsterhood is really *not* a desirable way of life; it is deficient, it is lacking, and who would deliberately and cheerfully choose to miss out on “the sweetest part of life”? Interestingly, this rather reactionary view is somewhat modified by the end of the series, in *Jo’s Boys*.

¹⁰¹ Alcott, L.M., *Little Women, Part Second*, p.466.

¹⁰² Alcott, L.M., *Little Women*, p.125.

At the beginning of *Jo's Boys*, the narrator informs the reader that ten years have passed since the story told in the previous book, giving an update on what has become of the original twelve boys of Plumfield School, plus the girls. The tomboy of Plumfield, Naughty Nan, we are told, is now "the pride of the community":

...like so many restless, wilful children, she was growing into a woman full of the energy and promise that suddenly blossoms when the ambitious seeker finds the work she is fitted to do well.¹⁰³

This statement could be applied to Jo March herself, of course, who was no doubt a very restless child, certainly once a very "ambitious seeker", and who has now settled into work that she does very well. Most interestingly in *Jo's Boys*, there appears to be a positive alternative to marriage and motherhood, for it is revealed that Nan has been studying medicine for four years and looks set for a noble career as a doctor. There are now more study and career options available to Nan; "thanks to other intelligent women, colleges and hospitals were open to her".¹⁰⁴ Although it is suggested that Nan has chosen to be a spinster, the narrator assures us that it is her devotion to her work, not lack of attractiveness (love-worthiness) to young men that has led her to this choice.¹⁰⁵

Several worthy young gentlemen had tried to make her change her mind and choose, as Daisy did, 'a nice little house and family to take care of'. But Nan only laughed, and routed the lovers by proposing to look at the tongue

¹⁰³ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.810.

¹⁰⁴ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.810.

¹⁰⁵ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.810. Nan is very much a feminist character: as a girl, she fights for respect and equality with the boys; when she grows up she chooses to work in a field traditionally associated with men. Nan even expresses dissatisfaction with American women not being able to vote.

which spoke of adoration, or professionally felt the pulse in the manly hand offered for her acceptance.¹⁰⁶

Nan's dedication to her chosen profession and her rejection of romance is portrayed in a positive light. The narrator seems to share in Nan's exasperation with Tommy Bangs' unwanted affections. Nan proves herself both calm and capable when she skilfully deals with Rob's bite from a possibly rabid dog. Clearly, Nan is not destined to be a yellow, gossiping, bitter spinster.

In *Jo's Boys*, the three March sisters regularly get together to sew and do the mending. This sewing circle is gradually expanded to include the girls of Laurence College, and while they sew, the women discuss all kinds of topics. Here we have an interesting mix of domesticity and feminism:

[T]hey read and sewed and talked in the sweet privacy that domestic women love, and can make so helpful by a wise mixture of cooks and chemistry, table linen and theology, prosaic duties and good poetry.¹⁰⁷

Initially, it is Meg who spearheads the expansion of the sewing circle to include the young women of Laurence College. She has noticed deficiencies in sewing duties, and seeks to improve this:

[F]or as she went her motherly rounds among the young women she found a sad lack of order, skill, and industry in this branch of education. Latin, Greek, the higher mathematics, and science of all sorts prospered finely;

¹⁰⁶ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.810.

¹⁰⁷ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.1005. As I will discuss in the next chapter, in the Little House series, Laura also becomes part of a sewing circle.

but the dust gathered on the work-baskets, frayed elbows went unheeded,
and some of the blue stockings sadly needed mending.¹⁰⁸

As well as being a place for sewing lessons, Jo

gave little lectures on health, religion, politics, and the various questions in which all should be interested, with copious extracts from Miss Cobbe's Duties of Women, Miss Brackett's Education of American Girls, Mrs Duffy's No Sex in Education, Mrs Woolson's Dress Reform, and many of the other excellent books wise women write for their sisters, now that they are waking up and asking: "What shall we do?"¹⁰⁹

This sewing/discussion group is a great success, having a positive effect on the young women both domestically and intellectually:

[T]he feet that wore the neatly mended hose carried wiser heads than before, the pretty gowns covered hearts warmed with higher purposes, and the hands that dropped the thimbles for pens, lexicons, and celestial globes, were better fitted for life's work, whether to rock cradles, tend the sick, or help on the great work of the world.¹¹⁰

The narrator makes it clear that education "is not confined to books, and the finest characters often graduate from no college, but make experience their master, and life their book",¹¹¹ and so the March sisters, experienced in marriage and more

¹⁰⁸ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.1005.

¹⁰⁹ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.1006.

¹¹⁰ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.1006.

¹¹¹ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.1004.

experienced in life than their younger sewing mates, have a lot of advice to give. The topics of career, marriage and spinsterhood are raised once again – Jo asks each of the girls in the room what she intends to do upon leaving college: “The answers were as usual: ‘I shall teach, help mother, study medicine, art,’ etc.; but nearly all ended with: ‘Till I marry.’” When Jo asks what will happen if the girls do not marry, the response from one of them is:

‘Be old maids, I suppose. Horrid, but inevitable, since there are so many superfluous women,’ answered a lively lass, too pretty to fear single blessedness unless she chose it.¹¹²

It is interesting once again, to note the insinuation that spinsterhood only ‘happens’ to girls who are lacking in something – those who are not love-worthy enough: we are told this lass is “too pretty to fear single blessedness unless she chose it”. Is the narrator insinuating that pretty girls should have no problem with spinsterhood unless they choose it? It is a choice, yet it is more natural to get married?

Little Women was written for girls, and, as such, its heroine could not become a literary or any other kind of spinster. Spinsterhood was simply not a fitting example of appropriate womanly ambition for young girls to aspire to, in a genre that sought to recommend “docility, marriage and obedience rather than autonomy or adventure”.¹¹³ Of course, spinsters did exist in real life; Alcott herself never married. Showalter suggests that “[w]ithin the Victorian framework of the

¹¹² Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.1006.

¹¹³ Showalter, E. “*Little Women*: The American Female Myth”, p.60.

novel, Jo's separation from her family can only be accomplished through marriage".¹¹⁴ By the time of *Jo's Boys*, however, a few alternatives were available to girls. Nan, for example, was able to pursue a career in medicine. However, as the sewing circle conversations with the Laurence College girls demonstrate, the standard paths for girls still led to marriage, despite the potential for new detours along the way.

Louisa May Alcott did not hide her lack of enthusiasm for *Little Women*. As well as calling it "moral pap for the young", she even wrote to one of her fans, "Though I do not enjoy writing 'moral tales' for the young, I do it because it pays well".¹¹⁵ After the publication of *Little Women*, Alcott became annoyed by girls who wrote to her eagerly wanting to know who the March girls would marry. "Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end aim of a woman's life. I *won't* marry Jo to Laurie to please any one".¹¹⁶ She wrote to her friend Alf Whitman, "Jo should have remained a literary spinster... but so many enthusiastic young ladies wrote to me clamorously demanding that she should marry Laurie, *or* somebody that I didn't dare refuse & out of perversity went & made a funny match for her. I expect vials of wrath to be poured out upon my head, but rather enjoy the prospect". She cynically suggested to her editor that *Little*

¹¹⁴ Showalter, E. "Little Women: The American Female Myth", p.60.

¹¹⁵ Myerson, J. and D. Shealy, eds. *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*, 25 Dec. 1878, p.232. Cited in Showalter, E. "Little Women: The American Female Myth", p.57.

¹¹⁶ As quoted from Myerson J. and D. Shealy, eds. *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1989, p.167, cited by O'Connor, K.S. in "Why Jo Didn't Marry Laurie", p.32, and Showalter, E. "Little Women: The American Female Myth", p.54.

Women, Part Second might be called ‘Leaving the Nest. The Sequel to Little Women,’ or ‘Wedding Marches,’ because there was “so much pairing off”.¹¹⁷

And so, Alcott created a “funny match” for Jo. Many fans of *Little Women* have nothing but animosity towards the middle-aged Professor Bhaer; it was bad enough that Jo March had to be married off just like her sisters instead of being allowed to pursue her literary dreams; it was even worse that she chose to marry the dowdy, opinionated Professor who criticised her sensation fiction and drove her to burn it and never write it again. The sensation fiction was one of Jo’s successes; she was a professional who wrote for a market and was paid accordingly for her work. When she burned her manuscripts and swore never to write such fiction again, a free-flowing creative outlet which earned her financial reward was cut off.

Showalter suggests that “many feminist critics have come to the conclusion that *Little Women* was the turning point at which Alcott compromised her imaginative vision in the interests of commercial success”.¹¹⁸ Alcott wrote in her journal that she wished “to realise [her] dream of supporting the family and being perfectly independent”.¹¹⁹ In *Little Women, Part Second*, Jo herself discovers the pleasure of having financial independence and being able to support her family, “that money conferred power, money and power, therefore, she resolved to have, not to be used for herself alone, but for those whom she loved more than self”.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Showalter, E. “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, p.54.

¹¹⁸ Showalter, E. “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, p.57.

¹¹⁹ O’Connor, K.S. “Why Jo Didn’t Marry Laurie”, p.26.

¹²⁰ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.367.

And so, just as Jo profitably wrote for a market that demanded sensation stories, Alcott wrote to the demands of her market, continuing the story of the Marches in not one but three sequels.

In “Why Jo didn’t Marry Laurie: Louisa May Alcott and The Heir of Redclyffe”, Karen Sands O’Connor suggests that following the convention of literary romance, it would simply have been wrong for Jo, the flawed heroine, to marry Laurie; the ‘correct’ wife for Laurie the handsome hero would be a refined, beautiful gentlewoman – and rather than transform Jo (too) dramatically to fit the part, Jo’s sister Amy is groomed (a less dramatic and possibly more acceptable transformation) for that role. O’Connor argues that Alcott, writing as a romantic rather than a feminist, followed the conventions of sentimental and pseudochivalric novels of the early nineteenth century: “These novels dictated that the ideal hero... never marry the flawed heroine”; and it is not only Alcott the writer, but Jo the flawed heroine herself, who knows this, and knows what needs to happen to execute “the proper end for the ideal hero”:

Jo is well aware of the rules of the game, having read so many novels herself. In her rejection she tells Laurie, ‘you’ll get over this after a while, and find some lovely, accomplished girl, who will adore you, and make a fine mistress for your fine house’.¹²¹

O’Connor suggests that the failure of Alcott’s first novel *Moods*

¹²¹ O’Connor, K.S. “Why Jo Didn’t Marry Laurie”, p.31.

...made her favour an ending to *Little Women* more in line with traditional romances. Jo refused Laurie so he could find a more suitable wife, and since the beginning of the second half of *Little Women*, Alcott had been creating the suitable wife in the character of Amy March.¹²²

Other critics have only harsh words to write about the marriage of Jo March. Judith Fetterley describes the fate of Jo March as one that ends in “self-denial, renunciation, and mutilation”,¹²³ while Madelon Bedell feels *Little Women* ends in “unease and dissatisfaction” with Jo’s marriage to a “sexless, fusty muddle-aged man,” sacrificing both “romance *and* independence”. Judith Fetterley sees Bhaer as

the heavy authority figure necessary to offset Jo’s own considerable talent and vitality. ...In marrying Professor Bhaer, Jo’s rebellion is neutralized and she proves once and for all that she’s a good little woman who wishes for nothing more than to realize herself in the service of some superior male.¹²⁴

Showalter, however, suggests that “[d]espite her joking complaints about pressure from her readers, Alcott intended Professor Bhaer to be much more than a ‘silly match’ for Jo”.¹²⁵ In *Little Women, Part Second*, having declared their love for one another, Jo tells her husband-to-be “‘I’m to carry my share, Friedrich, and help earn the home’”.¹²⁶ In her role as the matriarch of Plumfield, Jo plays an important role in the nurturing and education of the children who attend the school. She fulfils a

¹²² O’Connor, K.S. “Why Jo Didn’t Marry Laurie”, p.33.

¹²³ Cited in Showalter, E. “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, p.57.

¹²⁴ Cited in Showalter, E. “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, pp.60-61.

¹²⁵ Showalter, E. “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, p.61.

¹²⁶ Alcott, L.M. *Little Women, Part Second*, p.506.

different function within the school to that of her husband, whose realm of teaching is primarily in the classroom, but Jo's role within the school as important for the development of the children. Showalter asks: "Could Alcott have imagined a satisfying life for Jo outside of marriage and motherhood?"¹²⁷ My answer to that question would be – *imagine*, yes; but to actually write that alternate ending, *no*. It would be hard to argue, though, reading *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*, that Jo does not live a happy life, as a wife and mother.

It is worth noting that in a number of recent studies, Jo March has been analysed as a queer figure, one who exposes the categories of gender as socially constructed and performed, as opposed to biologically predetermined.¹²⁸ Karin Quimby suggests that Jo March represents much more than the choice between domestic life and individual identity; as mentioned earlier in this chapter, in Jo (and in the tomboy figure) we see the destabilisation of gender as a "natural construct" – something potentially highly problematic for a children's text. Not surprisingly, Alcott was "forced to submit to generic plot expectations and marry Jo off, restoring the heterosexual order",¹²⁹ and at the same time, ending her temporary disruption to the order of the children's text.

¹²⁷ Showalter, E. "Little Women: The American Female Myth", p.62.

¹²⁸ . See Quimby, Karen. "The Story of Jo: Literary Tomboys, *Little Women*, and the Sexual-Textual Politics of Narrative Desire." *GLQ* 10, no. 1, 2003, pp. 1-10 and Trites, Roberta Seelinger. "Queer Performances: Lesbian Politics in Little Women" in *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination*, edited by Beverly and Janice M. Alberghene Lyon-Clark, New York: Garland, 1999, pp.139-160.

¹²⁹ Quimby, K. "The Story of Jo: Literary Tomboys, *Little Women*, and the Sexual-Textual Politics of Narrative Desire", p.9.

The Revision of *Little Women*

I had not been aware that my copy of *Little Women* was a revised copy; I had thought what I had was a ‘full’, unabridged edition of the text. Little did I realise, my full text was not the text as Louisa May Alcott had originally written it, published in 1868. To briefly explore some of the implications of this discovery, I turn now to Elaine Showalter’s analysis of the revisions made to *Little Women*. Appearing in 1880, the revised version included changes which not only corrected but refined the text:

Spelling errors and mistakes in French were corrected, and Alcott’s vigorous slang, colloquialisms, and regionalisms were replaced by a blander, more refined and ‘ladylike’ prose. Jo calls her father “Papa” rather than “Pa,” says “work” rather than “grub,” “crumpled” rather than “crunched,” “ways” instead of “quirks,” “cross” instead of “raspy,” and “many” instead of “lots”.¹³⁰

The text was also simplified – “dumbed down” for a mass audience; a literary reference in Chapter 26 was also changed.¹³¹ In the original edition of *Little Women*, a number of engravings had been done by May Alcott, Louisa’s sister; however these had been received negatively by critics. With its earning potential now recognised, the new edition’s value as a commodity demanded more suitable illustrations; the new edition contained nearly two hundred illustrations by the popular artist Frank T. Merrill.¹³²

¹³⁰ Showalter, E. “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, p.55.

¹³¹ Showalter, E. “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, p.56.

¹³² Showalter, E. “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, p.55.

Although the character of Jo March was not significantly affected by the revisions, the changes to her friend Laurie are worth mentioning. Showalter suggests that the changes to the description of Laurie during his first meeting with Jo say “even more about the dictates of gender roles in successful literary romance”.¹³³ She describes the key changes to Laurie’s description:

In the original, when Jo sized up Laurie at the Gardiners’ party, he is both foreign and androgynous, with ‘curly black hair, brown skin, big black eyes, long nose, nice teeth, little hands and feet, tall as I am.’ Inviting Jo to dance, Laurie makes a ‘queer little French bow.’ Apparently, however, these less-than-perfect features and effeminate foreign gestures were a problem in the romantic hero. In the 1880 edition, Laurie is much improved: ‘handsome nose, fine teeth, small hands and feet.’ Most significantly for the belief in male superiority, Laurie is now ‘taller’ than Jo, and invites her to dance with ‘a gallant little bow’.¹³⁴

In her study of gender and popular British children’s fiction from 1880-1910, Kimberley Reynolds suggests that in stories aimed specifically at boys, masculinity was represented as not merely as different to femininity, but as distinctly different as possible – as its polar opposite, in fact, so that young readers would clearly see (and presumably adopt or *absorb*) an appropriate understanding of gender difference and socially sanctioned, correct gendered behaviour:

To clarify further the issue of sexual difference for boy readers, masculinity in these works is represented as the polar opposite of

¹³³ Showalter, E. “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, p.56.

¹³⁴ Showalter, E. “*Little Women: The American Female Myth*”, p.56.

femininity. This meant that acceptably masculine behaviour in male characters could not include any characteristics associated with femininity.¹³⁵

The revision of the description of Laurie's physical appearance and mannerisms fulfils a similar purpose; the revised Laurie appears more distinctly male and masculine to contrast with Jo. The readers of this revised *Little Women* are therefore exposed to representations of masculinity and femininity which reinforce clear gender difference and the binary system of gender – as per my discussion at the end of the previous section on the marriage of Jo March: a de-queering, of sorts, of the text.

The Matriarch of Plumfield: *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*

As 'books in series', the March texts reflect the progression of time. The characters develop and age; children grow up to become adults. Rather than continuing to centre the plots on characters whose stories of development were the focus of *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second*, Alcott shifts the perspective of *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys* to incorporate the third-person perspectives of the children who live at Plumfield. Meg, Jo and Beth, as well as their father and husbands, still feature prominently in these two texts, but the stories are now predominantly focused on the boys becoming 'little men' (and the 'new' girls now becoming another generation of 'little women'). The text, then, becomes focused on children, with its principal plots revolving around the concerns and interests of

¹³⁵ Reynolds, K. *Girls Only?*, p.53.

children and the lessons that they learn. As the adult, parent, supervisor and instructor, Jo now administers the lessons, rather than learns them.

The first chapter of *Little Men* is written from the perspective of Nat Blake, a new boy joining the school. Everything Nat sees is unfamiliar to him, just as it is to us, for now the world is Plumfield, rather than the March household. Through Nat's perspective, we are introduced to this strange new world, where different social dynamics operate. We are reintroduced to characters that have been transformed through the passing of time and experience. 'Meeting' Jo again, through Nat, we are forced to relate to the new Jo from a re-measured distance.

When Nat meets Jo, she is a stranger to him, and to us, the readers, in her new role.¹³⁶ When Nat first sees Jo, she is to him "a thin lady". This lady is warm and welcoming to him, greeting him and "drawing him to her, and stroking back the hair from his forehead with a kind hand and a motherly look, which made Nat's lonely little heart yearn toward her." The lady, Nat observes,

was not at all handsome, but she had a merry sort of face, that never seemed to have forgotten certain childish ways and looks, any more than her voice and manner had; and these things, hard to describe but very plain

¹³⁶ Another example of 'books written in series', the Billabong series by Mary Grant Bruce uses a similar technique to deal with its ageing main characters. In the tenth book, *Bill of Billabong* (1931), the third person limited perspective is shifted from Norah, Jim and Wally, who have aged over the course of the series and are now adults, to a new character – a boy named Percival (eventually given the nickname of Bill) who comes to live at Billabong. It is through Bill's eyes that Norah, Jim and Wally are observed and described in their adult roles. With their new roles and responsibilities as parents, spouses and managers of the Billabong property, the trio are not as free to have adventures as they were in past titles; Bill therefore takes on the role of mystery-solver and adventurer. Under the supervision and influence of Billabong's adults, Bill also learns valuable lessons about trust, loyalty and friendship. In Chapters Three and Four, I will examine mass-produced, mass-marketed children's series which dealt with the issue of ageing characters in a completely different way.

to see and feel, made her a genial, comfortable kind of person, easy to get on with, and generally ‘jolly’, as the boys would say.¹³⁷

The lady is sensitive to Nat’s insecurity and nervousness, being in an unfamiliar place; she herself observes “the little tremble of Nat’s lips as she smoothed his hair”. She introduces herself and her family, to Nat *and to us*: “I am Mother Bhaer, that gentleman is Father Bhaer, and these are the two little Bhaers”.”¹³⁸

As Mother Bhaer, Jo is arguably even more influential than Marmee, for she is “mother” to twelve boys at Plumfield, as well as her niece Daisy and Naughty Nan Harding. While her husband teaches the boys in the more formal setting of the classroom, Mother Bhaer teaches through play and conversation, being the comforter and confidante of her young charges. Mother Bhaer, we can see, understands her boys very well. She allows them to have all-out pillow fights every Saturday night in return for peaceful bedtimes during the rest of the week.¹³⁹ During his first meal at Plumfield, Mother Bhaer seats Nat next to Tommy Bangs, because “that roly-poly boy had a frank and social way with him, very attractive to young persons. Nat felt this, and had made several small confidences during supper, which gave Mrs Bhaer the key to the new boy’s character, better than if she had talked to him herself”.¹⁴⁰ Mother Bhaer really does know how to make boys feel at ease, comfortable and contented:

¹³⁷ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.526.

¹³⁸ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.526.

¹³⁹ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.536.

¹⁴⁰ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.530.

Nat...really did not know whether Mother Bhaer was a trifle crazy, or the most delightful woman he had ever met. He rather inclined to the latter opinion, in spite of her peculiar tastes, for she had a way of filling up a fellow's plate before he asked, of laughing at his jokes, gently tweaking him by the ear, or clapping him the shoulders, that Nat found very engaging.¹⁴¹

Mother Bhaer also carries out lessons of gendered behaviour. The chapter entitled "Patty Pans" referred to earlier begins with her niece Daisy upset that the boys won't let her play football with them. With the help of Uncle Laurie, Aunt Jo devises a new "play" for her niece that the boys are not allowed to share: a fully-functioning toy kitchen. With Aunt Jo as supervisor, Daisy cooks in her new kitchen. Unfortunately, just as Aunt Jo failed in her culinary attempts all those years ago, Daisy's enthusiasm is not enough to make a successful cook; her little pies are burnt black, her steak is "so tough that the little carving-knife would not cut it; the potato did not go round, and the squash was very lumpy,"¹⁴² For Daisy, however, her little tea party is less humiliating than Aunt Jo's was, for her guests are six dolls and her young cousin Teddy – no gossiping spinsters are in attendance! As her skills develop, Daisy uses her new kitchen to cook treats for the other boys, and for Professor Bhaer, no doubt practicing her future wifely duties.

The final part of Jo's transformation into Mother Bhaer that must be mentioned is her physical appearance. As Mother Bhaer, Jo is no longer the

¹⁴¹ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.547.

¹⁴² Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.582.

awkward, long-limbed colt that she was as a tomboy in *Little Women*. In fact, in *Jo's Boys*, the narrator tells us that it is “one of the family jokes that Jo was getting fat, and she kept it up, though as yet she had only acquired a matronly outline, which was very becoming”.¹⁴³

With Jo grown up, *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys* feature a new tomboy character. Annie Harding, known as Naughty Nan, becomes a resident at Plumfield. When Jo discusses the possibility of Nan coming to live at Plumfield with her husband, she tells her husband that she feels a great sympathy for Nan because

‘...I was such a naughty child myself that I know all about it. She is full of spirits, and only needs to be taught what to do with them to be as nice a little girl as Daisy. Those quick wits of hers would enjoy lessons if they were rightly directed, and what is now a tricky midget would soon become a busy, happy child. I know how to manage her, for I remember how my blessed mother managed me...’¹⁴⁴

Nan proves to be wilder than Jo ever was; she is a much more physical, hands-on and action-oriented tomboy than Jo was. On her first day at Plumfield, to prove to the boys that she never cries “no matter how much I’m hurt”, she fearlessly picks

¹⁴³ Alcott, L.M. *Jo's Boys*, p.872. In fact, Alcott uses the colt as a metaphor for Plumfield's most restless, clumsy, immature or troubled boys. Clumsy Ned Barker, for example, is described in a way reminiscent of young Jo: “like a thousand other boys of fourteen, all legs, blunder and bluster”. Not yet master of his limbs, Ned is known to “tumble over the chairs, bump against the tables, and knock down any small articles near him”, *Little Men*, p.541. Mother Bhaer thinks of the troubled Dan as “her colt” who has not been “thoroughly broken yet”, *Jo's Boys*, p.859. In *Little Men's* chapter entitled “Taming the Colt”, Dan actually does tame a real colt, and feels a great sense of achievement and satisfaction. Mother Bhaer tells him, “I am taming a colt too, and I think I shall succeed as well as you if I am patient and persevering”, p.733.

¹⁴⁴ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, pp.605-606.

a nettle when dared by Stuffy, holding it up “with a defiant gesture, in spite of the almost unbearable sting.”¹⁴⁵ Again dared by Stuffy, she runs at full speed into the barn, resulting in a blow to her head “that knocked her flat, and sounded like a battering-ram. Dizzy, but undaunted, she staggered up, saying stoutly, though her face was drawn with pain, ““That hurt, but I don't cry””.¹⁴⁶ Nan has a lot to prove in the world of Plumfield, which is dominated by boys; in *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second*, Jo was surrounded mainly by other girls, and her male friend Laurie never questioned her courage or worthiness to be his friend. While Jo rebelled against femininity, Nan also has to fight for equality and respect in her immediate community.

Impatiently waiting for her luggage to arrive, Nan goes by herself to the train station and retrieves it, dragging the large and heavy band-box back to Plumfield, returning “very hot and dusty and tired”.¹⁴⁷ She buries her biggest doll, forgetting it for a week, and then rescues it when it, all mildewy, and with a paintjob transforms it into an Indian chief who proceeds to tomahawk all the other dolls in the nursery, much to Daisy's horror.¹⁴⁸ Nan is never still; she involves not only the other children in her various activities, but the animals as well.

She delighted the boys by making a fire-ship out of a shingle with two large sails wet with turpentine, which she lighted, and then sent the little vessel floating down the brook at dusk. She harnessed the old turkey-cock to a straw wagon, and made him trot round the house at a tremendous

¹⁴⁵ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.608.

¹⁴⁶ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.608.

¹⁴⁷ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.611.

¹⁴⁸ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.612.

pace... She rode every animal on the place, from the big horse Andy to the cross pig, from whom she was rescued with difficulty. Whatever the boys dared her to do she instantly attempted, no matter how dangerous it might be, and they were never tired of testing her courage.¹⁴⁹

Nan is a highly intelligent student, and finds that in the classroom she gains “as much pleasure in using her quick wits and fine memory as her active feet and merry tongue”. Through Nan’s presence and achievements in the classroom, the boys find that they “had to do their best to keep their places, for Nan showed them that girls could do most things as well as boys, and some things better”.¹⁵⁰

As I have already discussed, published eighteen years after *Little Women*, *Jo’s Boys* reflects subtle shifts in choices for girls and women. Nan, ten years after *Little Men*, is described as “the pride of the community” despite choosing a career over marriage. Of course, there is no option to have a career *as well as* a marriage, but Nan the spinster is capable, attractive and dedicated. She will not be a yellow spinster; at the beginning of *Jo’s Boys* we are told that she has grown into “a handsome girl, with a fresh colour, clear eye, quick smile, and the self-poised look young women with a purpose always have”.¹⁵¹ In fact, she finds “so much happiness” in her chosen profession that it is unlikely that she will be a sour spinster either. It appears that being a doctor is *the* correct choice for Nan, in contrast with

¹⁴⁹ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, pp.612-613.

¹⁵⁰ Alcott, L.M. *Little Men*, p.613.

¹⁵¹ Alcott, L. M. *Jo’s Boys*, p.811.

Jo, for whom it seems true happiness proved elusive until she followed the conventional paths of marriage and motherhood.

Louisa May Alcott's March texts, particularly *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second* are quite openly *questioning* rather than subversive texts. Alcott's questioning of feminine domesticity and her exploration of the female creative writer are offset however, by equally conventional and negative views of spinsterhood, as well as the overwhelmingly positive portrayal of marriage and motherhood. Jo the tomboy and young woman is allowed to dream of literary fame and fortune, but her successes as a writer of sensation fiction are temporary, and her research for writing those stories is portrayed as morally corrupting.

Alcott explores the tensions between domesticity and the pursuit of a career; lessons learned by Jo demonstrate the conflict between self-control and self-expression. In *Little Women* and *Little Women, Part Second*, Jo March the tomboy is indeed used as an example of a girl who learns how to be a 'little woman'. Alcott allows Jo to dream of fame and fortune, and to enjoy some degree of financial success as a writer of sensation fiction; however the *real* happiness and satisfaction for Jo comes when she becomes Mother Bhaer at Plumfield – we can only imagine what the independent Jo's life may have been like. As the March texts were written for children, they were not allowed to deviate too far from ideological acceptability. Whether we read the figure of Jo March as representing the choice between domesticity and individuality, or heteronormativity or queer sexuality, in the end, Jo

could only dream of becoming a literary spinster. As a children's series heroine, she could not be allowed to live happily ever after as a spinster; marriage was the fitting outcome for heroines who all eventually grew up and out of their tomboyish ways.

In the next chapter I expand my discussion of the tomboy to include an analysis of performativity as it applies to the construction of gender in Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House series.

Chapter Two

Restless in the house: The Learning of Gender Performance in Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House Series

The Little House series, first published from 1932 to 1943, is based on author Laura Ingalls Wilder's childhood in the late nineteenth century. The tomboy and protagonist of the series is named Laura Ingalls. Most of the characters in the series are in fact based on and named after real people from Wilder's childhood. Being 'books in a series' where time progresses and the characters grow older, the Little House series is particularly interesting to examine in the context of this thesis, as it follows the development of Laura from age four until adulthood. Just as Laura matures, the books themselves seem to go through a process of maturation; the plot, language, and structure of the books become noticeably more complex as the series progresses, with the starkest difference observable between the first and the last book.¹

Over the course of the series, Laura's awareness of and attitude towards what is expected of her as a girl (and later, as a young woman) evolves as she learns to accept, and most importantly, consciously and deliberately *perform* femininity.

¹ Margaret Mackey comments "There is no comparison in terms of density of material, complexity of description and character, emotional demands of plot, between the first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, and the last, *These Happy Golden Years*. Not only Laura grows up in these books; the implied reader grows up as well" in "Growing with Laura: Time, Space, and the Reader in the 'Little House' Books." *Children's Literature in Education* 23, no. 2, 1992, p.61. Mackey goes on to provide and compare two examples of excerpts from the series, pp.61-62, to demonstrate the "very marked" differences in style and tone between the two.

Judith Butler suggests that it is “the various acts of gender [that] create the idea of gender”, and that “the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*”.² Throughout the series, Laura’s parents *repeatedly perform* their genders, repeatedly affirming the difference between their genders and appropriate gendered behaviour. The distinction between masculine and feminine, between Pa and Ma, are made clear: there is no question of who will venture from the family home to hunt and who will remain in the home to bake. As girls, Laura and her sisters are constantly watching the gender performances of their parents; it is expected that they will learn to repeat the gender performances of their mother, and that they will be “Ma” themselves one day. Through the tomboy character Laura, the Little House series demonstrates that gender performance is not naturally or automatically carried out ‘correctly’ by all girls; Laura has to learn and accept what is expected of her. She struggles with and initially resists performing femininity. Laura’s tomboyishness is portrayed as a part of childhood and immaturity. As a resistant, immature body, the tomboy is instructed, watched, appraised and disciplined by others, especially her mother and older sister Mary. By the end of the series, Laura has matured and not only learned to *correctly* perform these various acts of gender that signify femininity; she does so *deliberately as a constantly self-disciplined and self-appraising body*. As I explore Laura’s story of development, however, I will show that her journey from tomboy to mature young woman is not a simplistic one; I will discuss what I see as an ongoing tension throughout the series between the

² Butler, Judith P. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, *Thinking Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1990, p.140.

narrator's endorsement of a desire to constrain and conform, and at the same time, an implied endorsement of the tomboy's desire for freedom and rebellion.³

The Issue of Authorship

In relatively recent times, a number of researchers have focused on the issue of the authorship of the Little House books. Although Laura Ingalls Wilder is credited and widely known as the author of the series, examinations of Wilder's papers since her death have provided evidence to suggest that the series was written by Wilder in collaboration with her daughter Rose Wilder Lane – that is, that Wilder's daughter played an active part in the production of the Little House series.

In her paper entitled “Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane: the chemistry of collaboration”, Rosa Ann Moore examines the correspondence between Wilder and Lane during the writing of the fourth book of the series, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, which reveals the workings of Wilder and Lane's collaborative relationship. Moore writes of the Little House books: “They are the legacy of a unique mother-daughter team, one providing objectivity and the craft [Lane], the other bringing the life and the perspective [Wilder]”.^{4 5}

³ And of course, I have already discussed the ambivalent, contradictory messages in Alcott's March texts in the previous chapter.

⁴ Moore, Rosa Ann. “Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane: The Chemistry of Collaboration.” *Children's Literature in Education* 11, no. 3, 1980, p.108, my parentheses. This paper provides an interesting insight into the relationship between the two collaborators, as evident from their correspondence during the writing of *By the Shores of Silver Lake* (1939).

⁵ Both women were writers in their own right before working on the Little House series. Wilder's writing career began when she was in her forties, writing articles and columns on farming and housekeeping as Mrs A.J. Wilder, and Rose Wilder Lane was herself a novelist. Lane's novels

It was with the encouragement of Lane that Wilder wrote an autobiographical account of her childhood called “Pioneer Girl”, which follows a similar chronology to that of the Little House series, beginning with her early childhood and ending with her marriage to Almanzo Wilder.⁶ “Pioneer Girl” was rejected by magazine and book publishers as a proposed serial or novel, but a twenty page children’s story adapted by Lane from Wilder’s manuscript, entitled “When Grandma Was A Little Girl”⁷ became the basis for the first Little House book, *Little House in the Big Woods*.⁸

In his biography of Rose Wilder Lane entitled *The Ghost in the Little House: A Life of Rose Wilder Lane* (1993) William Holtz suggests that it is Lane, not Wilder, who was primarily responsible for the Little House texts. Holtz asserts that “almost everything we admire about the Little House books... [is] created by Rose’s fine touch”.⁹ Laura Ingalls Wilder, on the other hand is described by Holtz as “a determined but amateurish writer”.¹⁰ In *Constructing the Little House: Gender, Culture and Laura Ingalls Wilder* (1997), a detailed study of the Little House series, Ann Romines writes that Lane “placed high value on her name and writing reputation as a commodity and she often urged her mother to make ‘Laura

include: *Free Land* (1938), *Old Home Town* (1935) and *Let the Hurricane Roar* (1933). Later, in 1965 Lane was sent to Vietnam as a war correspondent at the age of 78 (Preface p. ix, Roger Lea McBride, *The First Four Years*). See Miller, John E. *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder*. Columbia, MS: University of Missouri Press, 1998, pp.115-117.

⁶ Miller, John E. *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder*, p.181.

⁷ Miller, John E. *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder*, p.182.

⁸ Miller, John E. *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder*, p.185.

⁹ As cited by Romines, Ann in *Constructing the Little House: Gender, Culture and Laura Ingalls Wilder*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997, pp.46-47.

¹⁰ As quoted by Romines A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.47.

Ingalls Wilder' similarly marketable".¹¹ It did make good sense from a marketing perspective for Laura Ingalls Wilder to be promoted as the sole author, for Wilder had experienced life as told by these stories; Lane had not. The knowledge that the stories were historically authentic autobiographical fiction could only enhance their appeal, and the drama of the Ingalls family's travels and triumphs was made more compelling because they were known to be based on real life experiences. The series was highly valued from a historical perspective, as it provided a unique perspective of a child, of pioneering life in the American nineteenth century. So resolute was Lane in promoting the singular author-figure of Laura Ingalls Wilder that, according to Romines:

Until her death in 1968, Rose Wilder Lane defended the myth of her mother's sole authorship against the strong evidence (overwhelmingly apparent in the Wilder-Lane papers) that Wilder and Lane collaborated on the series.¹²

Romines argues however, and I agree, that attempts to evaluate and attribute each woman's contributions to the series produce "an unproductive line of argument".¹³ In this chapter, I will discuss the Little House series following the basic assumption that the series was written collaboratively by Wilder and Lane, and then published under the name of Wilder. It is most likely, from evidence of manuscripts and correspondence between the two, that Wilder provided the source material and original manuscripts, and Lane then advised, redrafted and edited. I will base my

¹¹ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.48.

¹² Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.7.

¹³ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.47.

analysis of the tomboy of this series predominantly on the texts, discussing Laura Ingalls the character in the context of the narratives, rather than Laura Ingalls as the autobiographical extension of Laura Ingalls Wilder the author. Where my discussion is concerned with authorship, it will be in relation to relevant decisions made by Wilder and Lane as part of their collaborative process.

The Little House series texts, plot outlines and chronology

I will now provide brief outlines of the Little House texts, in order to provide an overall sense of the chronology and progression of the series and the development of its tomboy protagonist Laura.

Little House in the Big Woods (1932) introduces us to four-year old Laura who lives with her family, her parents Pa (Charles) and Ma (Caroline) and her sisters, in a log cabin in the Big Woods of Wisconsin. This story details many of the daily and seasonal aspects of living in the Big Woods, such as making butter and cheese, Butchering Time and the grain harvest, very clearly establishing the strong temporal structure of the narrative, as well as the distinction between male/masculine and female/feminine roles. Laura's secret resentment of her "always good" older sister Mary, which becomes a recurring theme throughout the series, is evident in this very first book. At the time of publication of the *Little House in the Big Woods*, the children's book market was beginning to show signs of being seriously affected by the Depression,¹⁴ but *Big Woods* proved to be an

¹⁴ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.13.

immediate success. In fact, like Alcott's *Little Women*, the Little House books have never been out of print since their first publication.

In the second book, *Little House on the Prairie* (1935), the Ingalls family travels by horse-drawn wagon to move from Wisconsin to make a new start in Kansas, which is still largely unsettled and known as Indian Territory. In this novel we read for the first time of Laura's love for travelling, her joy and excitement in being outdoors and surrounded by nature. This is another theme which will recur throughout the series. Pa builds the new family home with help from a new friend named Mr. Edwards, as well as a little assistance from Laura. Living out on the prairie, the family faces many dangers, including sickness, fires, wolves and unexpected visits from Indians. Just when the Ingalls have settled into their new farm and are looking forward to their first vegetable harvest, Pa learns that the government will be sending soldiers to move settlers out of Indian Territory. The family packs up and begins travelling once more, in search of a new home.

In *On the Banks of Plum Creek* (1937), the Ingalls family travel to Minnesota. At the beginning of the book, they move into a little dugout home in the side of a creek, but later on move into a house, newly built by Pa. Laura is disobedient and almost drowns in the creek. Laura and Mary go to school for the first time (Laura somewhat reluctantly) and Laura meets Nellie Oleson, who becomes her enemy and rival. The Ingalls family joins the local church congregation and celebrates a community Christmas, with a real Christmas tree.

This book covers a period of over two years, and features not one but two Christmases.

While the books mostly follow immediate narrative continuity, a noticeable gap of time occurs between *Plum Creek* and the next book, *By the Shores of Silver Lake* (1939). At the close of *Plum Creek*, Laura is around nine years old; at the start of *Silver Lake*, she is aged twelve. The story of *Silver Lake* begins with the Ingalls family impoverished, weakened and ill. Mary has been left permanently blind after suffering scarlet fever. Pa's sister Aunt Docia appears unexpectedly with a job offer for Pa, working on the railroad project in the Dakota Territory. Despite Ma's initial apprehension at moving yet again, the offer is simply too good to refuse, and Pa leaves for Dakota with Aunt Docia, leaving Ma and the girls to follow later by train when Mary is strong enough to travel. At the railroad camp, Laura is fascinated by the railroad project and the physicality of its workers. She becomes friends with her daring and boisterous cousin Lena, much to Ma's disapproval. Lena openly expresses disdain for marriage and domesticity and tells Laura of her resolve to never marry and settle down. When the Ingalls learn of a college for the blind in Iowa, they hope that Mary may go someday. Laura's parents tell her that they expect her to become a teacher just like Ma once was, now that Mary is blind. Although Laura does not want to become a teacher at all, she resolves to carry out her parents' wishes. When the railroad project is finished and the workers and their families have left the camp to travel westward, the Ingalls family remains behind to live temporarily in the Surveyors' House. Laura helps Ma cook for lodgers who

have arrived to make their claims for land in the new town of De Smet. Pa must now join the race to make a homestead claim before all the land is taken. By the end of the book, the Ingalls family moves into their new claim shanty. For the remainder of the series, the Ingalls family is settled in De Smet.

In *The Long Winter* (1940), an old Indian's prophecy that the coming winter will be harsh proves true. The Ingalls family is confined in town during months of relentless blizzards. Due to the extreme weather, the trains are stopped, and food and fuel supplies begin to run out. The family must ration their food and work together resourcefully to survive the winter. Laura helps Pa twist hay into sticks for burning, while Ma grinds wheat in the coffee mill so that the family can make bread. As the town's last reserves of food runs dangerously low, two young men, Cap Garland and Almanzo Wilder go on a dangerous trip in search of rumoured wheat many miles away.

In *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941), the Long Winter is over, and the Ingalls are now back living on their farm. Fourteen-year-old Laura, whom we know by now dislikes sewing, begins a sewing job in town. With all their savings, including the money Laura has earned, the Ingalls can at last afford to send Mary to the college for the blind in Iowa. When school reconvenes, Laura and her best friends are all the "biggest girls" of the school. Nellie Oleson returns, and it is clear that she and Laura are still enemies, for Nellie convinces the new school teacher, Eliza Jane Wilder that Laura is a troublemaker. Laura keeps up with the latest

fashions – wearing hooped skirts, cutting her hair in bangs and getting name cards. In town one day, Laura exchanges name cards with Almanzo Wilder, and soon after, he begins walking her home after church. After her presentation of American history at the School Exhibition, Laura is offered a teaching job at a settlement twelve miles away from home. Although she is only fifteen, Laura passes her teacher's examination and gets her first teaching certificate so that she may take on that job offer.

These Happy Golden Years (1943) begins where the previous book left off, with Pa taking Laura to her first teaching job, twelve miles away from home. Almanzo Wilder makes the trip at the end of each week to bring Laura home to be with her family, and takes her back to work every Sunday. Although Laura thinks Almanzo is bringing her home as a favour to Pa, when the teaching job is over Almanzo continues to see Laura, taking her on sleigh rides, and then buggy rides in the spring. Laura helps Almanzo break two horses for driving, which she enjoys immensely. Nellie Oleson tries to gain Almanzo's affections, but it is Laura that he is clearly interested in. The story ends with Laura's marriage to Almanzo at the age of eighteen, and her arrival in the new home Almanzo has built for them.¹⁵

¹⁵ Laura's age and the actual dates/time periods covered by the books have been calculated on the "Laura Ingalls Wilder, Frontier Girl" website, <http://webpages.marshall.edu/~irby1/laura/books.html> Accessed 2 February 2004. *Little House in the Big Woods* covers 1871 to 1872, with Laura aged 4-5 years old. *Little House on the Prairie* covers 1873 to 1874, with Laura aged 5-7 years of age. *On the Banks of Plum Creek* is set between 1874 to 1876, with Laura aged 7-9 years. *By the Shores of Silver Lake* is set from 1879 to 1880, with Laura aged 12-13 years of age. *The Long Winter* covers the period 1880 to 1881, with Laura aged 13-14 years old. *Little Town on the Prairie* covers the years 1881 to 1882, with Laura aged 14 to 15, and *These Happy Golden Years* is set between 1883 to 1885, with Laura 15 to 18 years old. The authors of "Laura Ingalls Wilder, Frontier Girl" note that the dates and ages calculated from the books sometimes differ from the real events.

These seven books are recognised as being the Little House series. Wilder once wrote that her purpose was to provide “a seven-volume historical novel for children covering every aspect of the American frontier”¹⁶ There are, however, two other books: *Farmer Boy* (1933), which tells the story of Laura Ingalls’ husband Almanzo Wilder’s boyhood, and *The First Four Years* (1971), published posthumously, fourteen years after Wilder’s death.¹⁷

Although *Farmer Boy* was in fact the second book published, after *Big Woods* and before *Little House on the Prairie*, it is usually cited as separate and in addition to the seven book series (as per footnote 17 below), rather than recognised as a part of it. This is most likely because *Farmer Boy* is focused on a different protagonist and family (being Almanzo and the Wilders). There is no reference whatsoever to Laura or her family in this book.¹⁸

The manuscript for *The First Four Years* was found amongst Wilder’s papers after her death and published in its original draft form. According to the Preface written by Roger Lea McBride,¹⁹ the book was not produced via the Wilder-Lane partnership; this is quite obvious to a reader familiar with the Little House series as the tone and style of the narrative is noticeably different to the other

¹⁶ Moore, R.A. “Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane: the chemistry of collaboration”, p.105.

¹⁷ The British edition Puffin paperbacks that I grew up with, published in the 1970s, provides the list of seven Little House books, followed by “Also: *Farmer Boy* The story of Almanzo Wilder’s boyhood”. There is no mention of *The First Four Years* in these editions. I did not find out about the existence of *The First Four Years* until I was an adult.

¹⁸ Boxed nine-book editions of the Little House series which include the seven books featuring the Ingalls family, plus *Farmer Boy*, and *The First Four Years* are now available.

¹⁹ See Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *The First Four Years*. New York: HarperCollins, 1972, pp.ix-xiii [Preface]. Roger Lea McBride was in fact, Lane’s lawyer and heir, according to Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.7.

books.²⁰ The story tells of the hardships experienced by Laura and Almanzo in the first four years of their marriage, including their increasing debts, the loss of their crops, their falling ill with diphtheria and Almanzo's subsequent relapse, the death of their second child and the burning down of their home which resulted in the loss of most of their possessions. In addition to its focus on much bleaker themes, *The First Four Years* is very different to the other Little House books because Laura and Almanzo are very much isolated. They have minimal contact with their families or any friends. Apart from a mention of Carrie and Grace in the first chapter of *The First Four Years*, the sisters have no other interaction in the book. Laura's sister Mary is not even mentioned. Miller comments: "De Smet, although only a couple of miles south of their farm, might just as well been on the moon".²¹ Not surprisingly then, with its much bleaker focus and its lack of familial relationships, *The First Four Years* is much less enjoyable than the earlier Little House books.

This chapter will focus on the Little House books excluding *Farmer Boy* and *The First Four Years*. Although *Farmer Boy* is 'related' to the other Little House books in that it tells the story of Almanzo Wilder's boyhood, it is not a Little House book as such. It does not feature Laura or any other tomboys, and its female characters are secondary. I have chosen not to include *The First Four Years* in my analysis for a number of reasons. Firstly, the text was published more than a decade

²⁰ From the start of *The First Four Years*, for example, Almanzo is referred to as 'Manly'. While it is now known that Manly was Wilder's pet name for her husband, its usage is somewhat jarring as the first chapter expands on events from *These Happy Golden Years* – Almanzo's proposal to Laura and their wedding day. In *These Happy Golden Years*, Laura was referring to Almanzo by his full name, but now in this new version of the same events, she is calling him Manly.

²¹ Miller, John E. *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder*, p.242.

after Wilder's death and was not produced via the Wilder-Lane partnership. As I have already stated, *The First Four Years* is starkly different in tone and style to the other books. Although it does continue the story of Laura and answers the question that has been no doubt asked by many a reader: "What happened to Laura after she married Almanzo?", Wilder never sought the publication of the manuscript; the decision to publish the story in its original, unedited form was made by third parties, not Wilder or Lane.²² Compared to the style and tone of the other Little House books, *The First Four Years* reads like a skeleton of a story that has not benefited from careful redrafting and editing. The story is focused more on the struggles of Almanzo and Laura in the first four years of their farming life together, rather than on the happy social times and interpersonal relationships with friends and extended family that featured so prominently in the other books. Laura of *The First Four Years* is more concerned with farming and finances than on issues of her gender and identity that were so prominent in the previous Little House books, and as such the text does not provide much relevant material for this thesis.

I have had to limit the scope of my discussion to fit into this chapter, and as such, will focus on a number of specific issues. I will examine the characterization of Laura the tomboy and the evolution of her attitudes towards the feminine. I will focus on Laura's relationships with her parents and her sisters (especially her older sister Mary, who plays the significant role of *the opposite*). Laura's parents

²² In the Preface to *The First Four Years*, McBride suggests that Wilder "lost interest" in working on the book following the death of her husband. He also tells of how Rose Wilder Lane gave him the manuscript for *The First Four Years*, and of how after her death in 1968 he brought it to Harper & Row (now HarperCollins)... "the editors at Harper and I all agreed that Laura's original draft should be published as she had first written it in her orange notebooks", p.x.

represent two opposing positions; Pa represents freedom, adventure, the outdoors, traveling, change and unpredictability –these are the things that Laura the tomboy is excited by and attracted to. She is drawn to the sensory pleasures of the outdoor world that Pa interacts with on a daily basis. Ma represents propriety, domesticity, self-restraint, self-denial and stability – everything that Laura the tomboy finds stifling and restrictive.

As Laura grows up, she becomes a disciplined, domestic body like Ma, learning to prioritise duty before her own desires. Laura becomes increasingly aware of being gazed upon by others, and she learns to gaze appraisingly at herself, comparing herself to other females. Her outward behaviour and appearance take on greater significance as the series progresses. Descriptions of the construction and wearing of clothing, for example, become noticeably more detailed within the narrative. Laura becomes an active participant in a number of significant collaborative sewing projects, such as the sewing of Mary's new winter dress, which she completes with Ma. As a young child, Laura is constantly in trouble with Ma for not wearing her sunbonnet carefully. As a young woman, correct and appropriate *costume* becomes even more important, as an essential part of Laura's conformity in her gendered performance. Out of all the books in the series, I will spend the most time focusing on *By The Shores of Silver Lake*, the fourth book of the series. This book begins with Laura aged twelve, and signifies new responsibilities for her. The issue of her gender takes on greater significance in this book and in the subsequent books, as I will discuss later in the chapter.

The Routine Performance of Gender

Little House in the Big Woods introduces the Ingalls family. Laura is the second daughter of Pa and Ma Ingalls. Laura's older sister is Mary, and her baby sister is named Carrie. Later in the series, there is another addition to the family, baby Grace.²³ In this first book, the Ingalls family lives in a cabin in Wisconsin. The nearest township is Pepin, seven miles away, where Pa goes on regular intervals to trade furs for the supplies that cannot be hunted, harvested or homemade. The story is narrated by a third person limited narrator, from Laura's perspective.²⁴

Big Woods, and indeed all of the Little House books individually as well as the series as a whole, has a distinctly temporal structure: the seasons pass, and time is marked by daily, weekly and seasonal routines and events. Butchering, Christmas, harvest, sugaring-off (and the dance and feast that follow) all mark the progression of time in the Big Woods. At four years of age, Laura is learning about the domestic routine that directs her life now and is assumed will continue to direct her daily life as an adult. Ma carries out the bulk of the domestic chores, but Laura and Mary help with smaller tasks, becoming an active part of the routine themselves:

Laura and Mary helped Ma with the work. Every morning there were the dishes to wipe... By the time the dishes were all wiped and set away, the

²³ There was in fact a fourth child born in 1875 before Grace, a son named Charles Frederick, who died at nine months – see Miller, J. E. *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder*, p.36. This child is not included in the Little House series – the fictional Ingalls family has four daughters and no sons.

²⁴ The books are all narrated in this way, although there are a few exceptions in *The Long Winter* where the third person limited perspective shifts to that of Almanzo Wilder and that of Pa Ingalls.

trundle bed was aired. Laura and Mary straightened the covers, tucked them in well at the foot and the sides, plumped up the pillows, and put them in place.²⁵

The girls are not merely being utilised as extra hands to help with the maintenance of the household; they are being trained in the feminine duties they will be expected to perform correctly and independently in their own households someday. They learn by observation of the practices modeled by Ma, and then put them into practice themselves. When Carrie (and later, Grace) are old enough, they too will contribute to the household chores. Much of the narrative of the series, especially in the early books, concentrates on daily chores and routines. Ma even has a rhyme about the routine:

Wash on Monday,
 Iron on Tuesday,
 Mend on Wednesday,
 Churn on Thursday,
 Clean on Friday,
 Bake on Saturday,
 Rest on Sunday.²⁶

To quote Butler again: “the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*”²⁷, and furthermore, she states that “[p]erformativity is not a singular act,

²⁵ Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Little House in the Big Woods*. Ringwood, VIC: Puffin, 1975, p.21.

²⁶ Wilder, L.I. *Little House of the Big Woods*, p.22.

²⁷ Butler, J. P. *Gender Trouble*, p.140, my italics.

but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body”²⁸ Everything that Ma *does* – her daily routine, the way she wears her clothes, the way she speaks to others, is carried out in very particular, repeated and ritualised ways. Ma’s rhyme is about routine and repeated acts of domestic maintenance that are performed by the woman (and the girls) of the household. In performing these chores, Ma reinforces her gender, and her gendered behaviour.²⁹ There is no question or possibility of Laura or her sisters breaking with gendered norms and going hunting with Pa; their place is with Ma at home. A number of daily routine chores carried out by the girls in later books are performed outside of the house, but always within the boundaries of the family property – milking the cow, feeding the chickens.

While the female members of the family carry out their prescribed chores, Pa performs his masculine duties outside of the house, hunting for meat or working in the fields. Although the narrative shows that young Laura enjoys helping Ma around the house, “the best time of all was at night, when Pa came home”.³⁰ Pa is the family’s storyteller. He keeps his daughters, especially Laura, entertained and spellbound with his tales of adventure. These are tales of *male* adventure: stories featuring himself or Grandpa as the hero. There are no heroines or any females, in fact, in Pa’s stories. Some of Pa’s stories are about interesting things that have

²⁸ Butler, J. *Gender Trouble* [Preface to 1999 anniversary edition], from Salih, S. ed., with Judith Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.94.

²⁹ As the daily and seasonal routines were such a significant part of Wilder’s life, it is not surprising that the stories, formed from her childhood memories, contain so much about them. Of course, this is also part of the series’ appeal to its twentieth century audience, for whom butchering, making butter and smoking venison are far removed from the everyday.

³⁰ Wilder, L.I. *House of the Big Woods*, p.24.

happened to him that day. To Laura, Pa's daily and past life as represented in these stories is unpredictable and exciting, in contrast to how she sees daily life in the cabin with Ma. Of course, as Romines comments, "Charles Ingalls' work as a farmer, hunter, and trapper is repetitive too. But this book is written from the point of view of a little girl who spends most of her time in the house with her mother and sisters".³¹ Laura does not have the option of being away from the home to experience the world as Pa does, which adds to the appeal of his stories.

From the start of the series, Laura clearly has a favorite parent: Pa. It is Laura who helps Pa with certain tasks, even though Mary is the eldest and should be just as, if not more capable before she becomes blind. In *Big Woods*, Laura helps Pa fetch hickory chips for smoking the venison, carrying the wood chips in her apron.³² In *Little House on the Prairie*, Laura helps Pa make the door for their new log cabin. While Mary passively watches, Laura hands Pa his tools.³³ Laura also assists in the building and installation of the new barn door.³⁴ In *Plum Creek*, Laura helps Pa catch fish using the fish trap,³⁵ and scales a whole fish, after Pa has shown her how.³⁶ In *The Long Winter*, fourteen-year-old Laura volunteers to help Pa make hay; Ma does not like to see women working in the fields, but allows it because Pa really does need the help.³⁷ As Laura gets older, she is only allowed to help Pa in non-feminine-identified tasks that are essential for the family's survival and where

³¹ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.27.

³² Wilder, L.I. *Little House on the Big Woods*, p.10.

³³ Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Little House on the Prairie*, Ringwood, VIC: Puffin, 1977, p.71.

³⁴ Wilder, L.I. *Little House on the Prairie*, p.74.

³⁵ Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. Ringwood, VIC: Puffin, 1974, p.93.

³⁶ Wilder, L.I. *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, p.94.

³⁷ Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *The Long Winter*. Ringwood, VIC: Puffin, 1985, p.10. Of course, if the Ingalls had any able-bodied sons to help Pa, Laura's help would probably be forbidden by Ma.

there are no people outside of family present (such as twisting hay to make sticks for the fire in *The Long Winter* – this is such an essential task that both Laura and Ma help). Laura helps Pa with the haymaking out on their homestead claim, but as the family prepares to move back to town during the winter, Pa tells Laura that “‘Town’s no place for a girl to be doing a boy’s work’”.³⁸ The Ingalls, especially Ma, would not want the townspeople to see their daughter performing work that is supposed to be done by boys. Only when the family was living out in the “uncivilised” country could Laura participate in publicly visible chores with Pa.

As Laura gets older, the father-daughter collaborations decrease in frequency. When she is a child, Laura is temporarily allowed to participate in Pa’s world, but when she grows up she is expected to retreat into her ‘proper’ place with Ma or with other females. In the books from *The Long Winter* onwards with the family permanently settled (and ‘civilised’) in De Smet, Laura is more often helping Ma in preparing dinner or taking care of her siblings, sewing or crocheting with Ma or her female school friends, or contributing to the family finances by working in town in roles deemed appropriate for females: sewing and teaching.

Romines points out that by the series end, Laura’s allegiance has shifted from Pa to Ma. She identifies the turning point in Laura’s allegiance as occurring in *The Long Winter*. She writes:

Long Winter also makes significant changes in the gender orientation of the series. As a narrative of confinement and the extremes of domestic

³⁸ Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.55.

survival, it is *Ma's* book. In this novel, the dynamics of the series change. Pa's weaknesses begin to be apparent, and Laura is pushed to recognize that, as a young woman, her primary affinities must be with her mother, not her father. Although Pa does his best, it is primarily Ma who finds the resources of endurance and culture that keep her family alive, fed, and sane through the months of unrelenting confinement, when they are huddled in one heated room of Pa's store and, after the railroad has discontinued service, must subsist on wheat and tea.³⁹

We also see a 'breaking' of allegiance from one parent to another in Carol Ryrie Brink's *Caddie Woodlawn* (1935). There are a number of similarities between Caddie and Laura; just as young Laura prefers to play with Clarence Huleatt and later longs to play catch with the boys at school, Caddie prefers to play with boys, namely her brothers Tom and Warren. Caddie's Mother, like Laura's Ma, represents propriety and restraint. Caddie's older sister Clara, is very much like Laura's sister Mary; to Caddie, her older sister seems to belong on the *other* side of the family where "all the safe and tidy virtues were".⁴⁰ Just as Mary stays home dutifully sewing while Laura ventures from the shanty with Pa to see the railroad project in *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, Caddie and her brothers have adventures, visit the Indian camp, go picking wild grapes and gathering nuts, while Caddie's sisters "preferred to stay home and help Mother with the sewing".⁴¹

³⁹ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.163.

⁴⁰ Brink, Carol Ryrie. *Caddie Woodlawn*. New York: Aladdin, p.3.

⁴¹ Brink, C.R. *Caddie Woodlawn*, p.53.

Caddie's father, we are told, has encouraged her tomboyish ways despite her mother's disapproval, but after twelve-year-old Caddie leads her brothers in playing tricks on her visiting cousin Annabelle, Caddie's mother is appalled and ashamed of her behaviour, and banishes her to her room in disgrace. When Caddie's father comes later to comfort her, he talks to her about growing up, the differences between the genders, and the noble work of women, bringing about a turning point for Caddie, who has until now scorned the idea of becoming a lady:

'It is the sisters and wives and mothers, you know, Caddie, who keep the world sweet and beautiful. What a rough world it would be if there were only men and boys in it, doing things in their rough way! A woman's task is to teach them gentleness and courtesy and love and kindness. It's a big task, too, Caddie – harder than cutting trees or building mills or damming rivers. It takes nerve and courage and patience, but good women have those things. They have them just as much as the men who build bridges and carve roads through the wilderness. A woman's work is something fine and noble to grow up to, and it is just as important as a man's. But no man could ever do it so well. I don't want you to be the silly, affected person with fine clothes and manners whom folks sometimes call a lady. No, that is not what I want for you, my little girl. I want you to be a woman with a wise and understanding heart, healthy in body and honest in mind'.⁴²

When Caddie wakes up the next day she realises:

...she need not be afraid of growing up. It was not just sewing and weaving and wearing stays. It was something more thrilling than that. It was a

⁴² Brink, C.R. *Caddie Woodlawn*, p.244.

responsibility, but, as Father spoke of it, it was a beautiful and precious one, and Caddie was ready to go and meet it.⁴³

I have already discussed the sewing circle of women which is featured in *Jo's Boys* and the Little House series. Caddie, newly ready to embrace the responsibility of growing up, tentatively but willingly joins her mother, sisters and other women in a sewing group during a quilting session. Caddie is warmly welcomed into the group by the others, and even Cousin Annabelle, who suffered the brunt of Caddie's tricks, helps Caddie with her sewing so that she may contribute to the collaborative project. Caddie reflects later,

'How far I've come! I'm the same girl and yet not the same. I wonder if it's always like that? Folks keep growing from one person into another all their lives, and life is just a lot of everyday adventures. Well, whatever life is, I like it'.⁴⁴

In *Caddie Woodlawn*, growing up and accepting femininity is portrayed as a positive, empowering experience, supported not only by one's family, but the wider female community. We do see Laura becoming more involved with a female community, getting together to sew with her school friends, and working with her mother on sewing projects, later in the series. But before this, the earlier books concentrate on Laura's reflections on her role and place in the world, and on establishing the distinction between the masculine and feminine domains.

⁴³ Brink, C.R. *Caddie Woodlawn*, p.246.

⁴⁴ Brink, C.R. *Caddie Woodlawn*, p.275.

In the Little House series, the feminine is signified by the domestic and the internal: the housekeeper performing her routine in the little house. It is not surprising that the china shepherdess ornament which belongs to Ma, referred to in a number of the books, is a symbol of the settled home. Each time she makes her appearance, the shepherdess is only taken out of her protective wrappings and put on display when the family is settled in a new home. When the family moves into the railroad camp at Silver Lake, for example, Ma tells Pa that she does not plan to unpack the shepherdess: ““We aren’t living here, we’re only staying here till you get the homestead””.⁴⁵ A proper home in a proper house, and living in a ‘civilised’ way is very important to Ma. Romines calls Ma the “conceptual architect” of the little house – and when Ma is in a proper little house, she carefully brings out and arranges “her essential vocabulary of cultural signifiers, such as the shepherdess, curtains, quilts, books and a red-checked tablecloth...”⁴⁶

The masculine is the pioneer, the traveler, the hunter and explorer of the external world, best represented by Pa’s stories, the wide, wild prairie and the idea of traveling “West”. Throughout the series, descriptions of Laura’s observations, admiration and appreciation of the external world is indicative of the intense feelings that draw Laura away from the little house. In *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, Laura prioritises closeness with the external world over safety; although the family has moved into the relative safety of a riverbank dugout home, Laura “would rather sleep outdoors, even if she heard wolves, than to be so safe in this house dug under

⁴⁵ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.58.

⁴⁶ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.174.

the ground”.⁴⁷ Of course, as a child and a daughter, she has no agency to make her own decision to sleep outdoors, and her preference to sleep outdoors remains internalised, unknown to Pa and Ma, but known to us the readers.

Laura is clearly torn between these two poles of identity – the wild/masculinity and the tamed/femininity. At the conclusion of *Silver Lake*, when the railroad workers and their families pack up to move out West, Laura is keen to follow, but Ma gets her wish for her family to remain behind. Although Pa acknowledges that Laura and he “want to fly like the birds”, he has promised Ma that he will get a homestead claim, and the girls will go to school.⁴⁸ In *The Long Winter*, although Laura recognises that the frost kills the tomato plants, she still loves “the beautiful world”.⁴⁹ As she thinks about the impending threat of a hard winter, she fantasises about making her escape, as a bird: “If she had had the wings of a bird, she, too, would have spread them and flown, fast, fast, and far away.”⁵⁰ For Laura, the Long Winter is especially difficult, as it means being trapped in the house, kept safe but apart from “the beautiful world” during the blizzards. In contrast, in the next book *Little Town on the Prairie*, Laura is happy outdoors once more as she feeds the cow: “Laura wanted nothing more than just being outdoors. She felt she never could get enough sunshine soaked into her bones”.⁵¹ This intense thirst for sunshine is related to Laura’s rebellion concerning the wearing of her

⁴⁷ Wilder, L.I. *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, p.17.

⁴⁸ Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*. Ringwood, VIC: Puffin, 1977, p.97.

⁴⁹ Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.27.

⁵⁰ Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.55.

⁵¹ Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Little Town on the Prairie*. Ringwood, VIC: Puffin, 1977, p.8.

sunbonnet, and the papoose incident in *Little House on the Prairie*, both of which will be discussed later in this chapter.

More so than the other books, *Little House on the Prairie*, *On the Banks of Plum Creek* and *By the Shores of Silver Lake* all feature the uncertainty of traveling and change. In all of these books, the Ingalls family must adapt to different dwellings in unfamiliar and even dangerous surroundings, as they settle into life in new parts of the country. Both Pa and Laura thrive on this, while Ma constantly pushes for the family to settle permanently, so that the girls may attend school and the family may become part of a community and church.

Laura and Mary

As with most of the texts discussed in this thesis, the tomboy character is contrasted with an opposing ultra-feminine character. In Laura's case, this is her older sister Mary. Their differences are physical as well as in temperament. As early as *Little House in the Big Woods*, Laura compares her looks and attitudes to Mary's, and is envious of her. On the Ingalls' first trip to the town of Pepin, the narrator tells us,

The storekeeper said to Pa and Ma, 'That's a pretty little girl you've got there,' and he admired Mary's golden curls. But he did not say anything about Laura, or about her curls. They were ugly and brown.⁵²

⁵² Wilder, L.I. *Little House in the Big Woods*, p.98.

Of course, it is not the storekeeper saying that Laura's curls are "ugly and brown"; that description is Laura's own assessment of her hair, compared to Mary's blonde curls.

Mary is portrayed as a girl who always remembers her manners and can be relied upon to do and say all the right things. She is the "good" sister who is naturally and contentedly obedient. In *Big Woods*, Mary remembers to thank the shopkeeper when he gives the girls some candy, but Ma has to prompt Laura. In the same chapter, Mary and Laura collect pebbles to take home, but Laura is greedy and overloads her pocket, tearing her best dress. Laura is resentful that Mary always seems to do all the right things:

Mary was a good little girl who always kept her dress clean and neat and minded her manners. Mary had lovely golden curls...

Mary looked very good and sweet, unrumped and clean, sitting on the board beside Laura. Laura did not think it was fair.⁵³

Mary is naturally good, docile and obedient. In *Big Woods*, Laura's preference is for physical and boisterous games. When Mr. and Mrs. Huleatt come to visit, Mary plays with their daughter Eva, who is pretty and plays "carefully", keeping her dress "clean and smooth". Laura plays with Eva's brother Clarence instead: "Laura and Clarence ran and shouted and climbed trees, while Mary and Eva walked nicely together and talked".⁵⁴ In Plum Creek, Pa punishes the girls whenever they go near

⁵³ Wilder, L.I. *Little House in the Big Woods*, p.102.

⁵⁴ Wilder, L.I. *Little House in the Big Woods*, p.105.

the deep water, by ducking them. “Mary was a good girl after one ducking, but Laura was ducked many times”.⁵⁵

In *Little House on the Prairie*, Pa takes Mary and Laura to an abandoned Indian camp, where the girls are excited to find Indian beads, of which they each collect a handful. When they get home, Mary selflessly tells Ma that Carrie may have her beads, but Laura does not want to do the same:

Ma waited to hear what Laura would say. Laura didn’t want to say anything. She wanted to keep those pretty beads. Her chest felt all hot inside, and she wished with all her might that Mary wouldn’t always be such a good little girl. But she couldn’t let Mary be better than she was.⁵⁶

In the end, Laura gives up her beads to Carrie as well. She is resentful of Mary for having put her in that position. Her resentment of Mary even causes her to think about physically hurting Mary.

Perhaps Mary felt sweet and good inside, but Laura didn’t. When she looked at Mary she wanted to slap her. So she dared not look at Mary again.⁵⁷

Even when they are older, the tension created by Mary and Laura’s opposing responses to situations continues. In *The Long Winter*, Mary is immediately

⁵⁵ Wilder, L.I. *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, p.22..

⁵⁶ Wilder, L.I. *Little House on the Prairie*, p.121.

⁵⁷ Wilder, L.I. *Little House on the Prairie*, p.122.

agreeable to Ma's suggestion that they save their Youth's Companions to read on Christmas Day, while Laura expresses resistance:

...Mary said, 'I think it is a good idea. It will help us to learn self-denial.'

'I don't want to,' Laura said.

'Nobody does,' said Mary. "But it's good for us."⁵⁸

When Mary goes blind, Pa tells Laura she must be "eyes for Mary".⁵⁹ In *Little Town on the Prairie*, Laura observes that "It was odd that when they were little, Mary had been the older and often bossy, but now that they were older they seemed to be the same age".⁶⁰ Now that Mary has been disempowered by her blindness, she is reliant on Laura outside of the house. This phenomenon of their ages is also due to Laura's increasing self-discipline and conformity; when they were younger, Mary constantly reminded Laura when she was not behaving as she should, and the sisters' natural behaviour was often in opposition to each other. With Laura becoming more accepting and performing femininity correctly, there is no need for Mary to be "often bossy".

Most of the money Laura makes from her jobs goes towards Mary's college fund. Ironically, Laura's first job is a sewing one – the very activity she detests. She takes on the work so that she can contribute to the family finances, putting her own desire after the greater good of the family. In his biography of Laura Ingalls Wilder,

⁵⁸ Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.35.

⁵⁹ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.22.

⁶⁰ Wilder, L.I. *Little Town on the Prairie*, p.13.

Miller comments on this sewing job: “In taking a job in town that she really did not want, Laura subordinated her own wishes to the larger needs of her own family and acted out a script that substituted self-control for self-gratification”.⁶¹

The Papoose

In *Little House on the Prairie* while the Ingalls are living in Indian Territory, young Laura becomes obsessed with the idea of seeing an Indian baby, a papoose. When she finally gets her wish, it is during the Indians’ mass exit of the territory as they walk towards the west, forced out by the American soldiers. Laura’s sighting of the papoose is an intense experience: “Those black eyes looked deep into Laura’s eyes and she looked deep down into the blackness of that little baby’s eyes... its eyes kept looking into Laura’s eyes”.⁶²

Suddenly seized by a powerful desire, Laura begs Pa to get the papoose for her. Ma is bewildered by this request: “Ma said she had never heard of such a thing. ‘For shame, Laura,’ she said, but Laura could not stop crying”.⁶³ When asked by Ma why she wants an Indian baby, Laura finds herself lost for words and unable to explain: “‘Its eyes are so black,’ Laura sobbed. She could not say what she meant”.⁶⁴ Romines suggests that on one level,

Laura’s demand for the baby may express an imperious, hegemonic sense of cultural entitlement by which the Indian child becomes an object of desire, a possession like the trade beads.

⁶¹ Miller, J.E. *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder*, p.57.

⁶² Wilder, L.I. *Little House on the Prairie*, p.204.

⁶³ Wilder, L.I. *Little House on the Prairie*, p.206.

⁶⁴ Wilder, L.I. *Little House on the Prairie*, p.206.

She also suggests that

...the intense look that Laura exchanges with the baby also suggests possibilities of a shared lifestyle and a shared life between the Euro-American and Native American children. Laura is reaching toward an extended family that she might share with both her white sisters and an Indian baby...⁶⁵

My analysis of the incident is slightly different to that of Romines. I believe the clue to explaining Laura's desire for the papoose is in Laura's watching of the Indians as they pass by – she notices the women and children as they ride their ponies:

The ponies did not have to wear bridles or saddles, and the little Indians did not have to wear clothes. All their skin was out in the fresh air and the sunshine. Their straight black hair blew in the wind ...

Laura looked and looked at the Indian children, and they looked at her. She had a naughty wish to be a little Indian girl. Of course she did not really mean it. She only wanted to be bare naked in the wind and the sunshine, and riding one of those gay ponies.⁶⁶

I suggest that it is not so much the desire to possess an objectified baby, nor the desire for a shared life with an extended family that results in Laura's outburst. Rather, it is Laura's intense, unquenchable desire to be unencumbered, feeling the wind and sunshine through her hair and on her bare skin, to be allowed to ride a

⁶⁵ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.78.

⁶⁶ Wilder, L.I. *Little House on the Prairie*, p.204.

pony (which is also naked, without a bridle or saddle) bareback out towards the west – Laura’s desire to be free in the world – that is expressed in her desperate pleas to Pa for that baby. I argue that it is not specifically the baby that Laura covets, but what the baby represents – a life so different to her own, one that is so much closer to the natural physical and sensory world, a life outside of the walls of the little house of routine, and a life that is moving away to the mysterious and alluring west. Laura instinctively desires that life that is so ‘other’ to her own, and owning or having that baby is a way to ‘have’ that which she desires. Of course, Laura can never break free from her life to live the ‘other’ life that seems so exciting to her, never again in the series is such a passionate outburst provoked.

Laura’s Sunbonnet

Laura’s overwhelming attraction to the idea of riding bare naked on bare naked ponies feeling the wind and sunshine is not a really surprise to the careful reader. Before the papoose incident, the reader is shown just how Laura is prohibited from experiencing the wind and sunshine. Living out on the prairie, Ma has become concerned with ensuring that her daughters’ skin is protected from the sun and wind. Laura’s sunbonnet becomes her most hated item of clothing. When she is out playing and out of Ma’s sight, Laura lets her sunbonnet hang down her back because when tied on properly it restricts her view: “When her sun-bonnet was on she could only see what was in front of her, and that was why she was always pushing it back and letting it hang by its strings tied around her throat”.⁶⁷ Laura only wears her sunbonnet properly when Ma is watching. In *Plum Creek*, Laura

⁶⁷ Wilder, L.I. *Little House on the Prairie*, p.86.

again allows her sunbonnet to hang down her back as she goes to pick plums with Mary, who has kept *her* sunbonnet on. When the girls walk to school together for the first time, Mary takes on Ma's role, saying to Laura:

‘For pity’s sake, Laura... keep your sunbonnet on! You’ll be as brown as an Indian, and what will the town girls think of us?’

‘I don’t care!’ said Laura, loudly and bravely.⁶⁸

Being the “good” sister and older than Laura, Mary has begun to self-appraise and compare her appearance with the other girls. Laura is defiant now and refuses to ‘play along’, but later in the series, she herself will develop similar concerns.

In *Silver Lake*, Laura is still struggling to accept wearing her sunbonnet. When Laura and her sisters go for a walk together, “Mary’s sunbonnet and Carrie’s were tied firmly under their chins, but Laura swung hers by the strings”.⁶⁹ Later, as the family rides out together to their new homestead, Laura is once again the only Ingalls daughter not performing in correct costume, and must be disciplined by Ma:

‘For pity’s sake, Laura, put on your sunbonnet!’ Ma exclaimed. ‘This spring wind will ruin your complexion.’ And she pulled Grace’s little bonnet farther forward to protect her fair, soft skin. Mary’s face was far back in her bonnet, and so was Ma’s, of course.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Wilder, L.I. *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, p.97.

⁶⁹ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.60.

⁷⁰ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.199.

And of course, when Laura obeys Ma and wears her sunbonnet properly, she envelopes herself in tunnel vision:

Slowly Laura pulled up her own bonnet by its strings, from where it hung down her back, and as its slatted sides came past her cheeks they shut out the town. From the tunnel of the bonnet she saw only the green prairie and blue sky.⁷¹

Romines suggests the reasons for Ma's preoccupation with her daughters' complexion:

In the nineteenth-century United States, a woman's pale complexion often signified privilege, shelter, protection, and confinement; it was also an external indicator that she did not belong to one of the darker-skinned races against which U.S. law and custom discriminated.⁷²

The sunbonnet is a woman's main defence against the sun and wind when she is outside the defences of her little house, and it is a sign that she lives within the feminine domain of a civilised 'little house'.

An increasing emphasis on appearance

In *The Long Winter*, Pa asks Laura to go into town to buy a new cutter section. Laura dreads going into town because "but strange eyes looking at her

⁷¹ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.199.

⁷² Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, pp.58-59.

made her uncomfortable”⁷³ She is becoming increasingly aware and self-conscious of her appearance. Laura ponders what she should wear for her trip into town, and Ma instructs and gives permission for what she should wear. Knowing that she must go into town with a sunbonnet on her head (on this occasion, Laura does not even consider the possibility of not wearing a sunbonnet) and also knowing of the less than perfect condition of her own sunbonnet, Laura asks if she may wear Mary’s freshly ironed one, but Ma insists that Laura must wear her own, using the opportunity to make a point very familiar to Laura and the reader:

‘It would be fresher,’ Ma said, ‘if you took care to keep it so.’ Laura’s bonnet was limp from hanging won her back and the strings were limp too. But that was Laura’s own fault.⁷⁴

Beyond the recurring references to the sunbonnet, feminine clothing, hairstyles and physical appearance are given increasing emphasis and described in greater detail as the series progresses, as their role in Laura’s life takes on greater significance and immediacy, as appropriate costumes for the feminine role.

In *Big Woods*, five-year-old Laura is in awe when Ma wears her delaine dress, which is only taken out of storage on very special occasions. The dress is described in intricate detail, emphasizing its beauty:

It was a dark green, with a little pattern all over it that looked like ripe strawberries...

⁷³ Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.19.

⁷⁴ Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.19.

The delaine was kept wrapped in paper and laid away. Laura and Mary had never seen Ma wear it, but she had shown it to them once. She had let them touch the beautiful dark red buttons that buttoned the basque up the front, and she had shown them how neatly the whale-bones were put in the seams, inside, with hundreds of little criss-cross stitches.

It showed how important a dance was, if Ma was going to wear the beautiful delaine dress.⁷⁵

Laura is learning the difference between dressing for ordinary days and special occasions. In the Big Woods, Laura is only a little girl and can only observe as her mother and aunts Ruby and Docia get ready for the sugaring-off dance (after they have completed their domestic duty of preparing the feast that will be served after the dance). Laura's observations of the women's ritual are provided in great detail: how they part and braid their hair, how they wash using "store soap", not the "common soap" of everyday use, how they admire their hair in the mirror, and how they pull on their stockings with "lacy, openwork patterns", and how they button up their "best shoes". Laura observes as the women help each other to pull their corsets tight; while Aunt Docia breathlessly urges Aunt Ruby to keep pulling, she measures her own waist with her hands.⁷⁶ These are all practices that Laura herself will perform someday. And when Ma emerges in her delaine dress, "Ma looked so rich and fine that Laura was afraid to touch her".^{77 78 79}

⁷⁵ Wilder, L.I. *Little House in the Big Woods*, p.77.

⁷⁶ Wilder, L.I. *Little House in the Big Woods*, pp.82-83.

⁷⁷ Wilder, L.I. *Little House in the Big Woods*, p.84.

⁷⁸ In "Little House on the bottom line", *Horn Book Magazine*, Nov 1998, p.689, Christine Heppermann suggests that "the new picture books, short chapter books, and novelty books rob children of the chance to get caught up in the wonderfully exotic, methodically described processes

In the later books of the series, Laura is the woman getting dressed, and her younger sister Carrie is the one watching. In *These Happy Golden Years*, the chapter entitled “The Brown Poplin” details Laura’s acquisition of a new brown poplin dress and poke bonnet. As Laura’s aunts did back in the Big Woods before their young audience, Laura tends to her hair, perhaps in even more elaborate fashion: she brushes, coils, pins and curls it; she puts on white-lace stockings and buttons her shoes.⁸⁰ The next page continues with detailed descriptions of Laura’s dressing, and the many layers, buttons and materials used in her dress.⁸¹

As a girl living in rural or isolated locations such as the Big Woods or Indian country, Laura compares herself with the girl closest to her, her sister Mary. In *Little Town on the Prairie*, Mary is away at college, and Laura, now one of the “biggest girls” at school, compares her appearance and outfits to the other girls who include her friends Ida, Mary Power and Minnie and of course, her nemesis Nellie Olesen. Laura observes that they “were all tanned brown from the summer sun, except Nellie, who was paler and more ladylike than ever. Her clothes were so

of Ingalls family life”. Citing the specific example of the description of Ma’s delaine dress with its pattern of “little leaves that looked like strawberries”, the picture book called “Dance at Grandpa’s”, adapted from the sugar dance of Big Woods has eliminated all that detail of the dress and Laura’s awe. “Readers of Dance at Grandpa’s don’t stay at the party long enough to get swept away by it. They aren’t allowed to witness Ma’s awesome transformation from her everyday self to a woman who ‘looked so rich and fine that Laura was afraid to touch her’”(*Little House in the Big Woods*, p.84). Heppermann writes about the abridged versions of the Little House books, expressing regret that such passages of description, and Laura’s being afraid to touch Ma, are omitted.

⁷⁹ Laura is used to seeing her ordinary, everyday Ma, doing her chores around the house. When Ma hulls corn, Laura thinks “Ma looked so pretty, with her bare arms plump and white, her cheeks so red and her dark hair smooth and shining, while she scrubbed and rubbed the corn in the clear water” *Little House in the Big Woods*, p.127. In *Farmer Boy*, Almanzo also admires his mother at work: “But to Almanzo the most beautiful sight was his mother, bringing in the big willow-ware platter full of sizzling ham”, p.24.

⁸⁰ Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *These Happy Golden Years*. Ringwood, VIC: Puffin, 1977, p.133.

⁸¹ Wilder, L.I. *These Happy Golden Years*, p.134.

beautiful... that Laura grew dissatisfied with her brown school dress and her blue cashmere..."⁸² Laura herself is wearing hoops, which she does willingly because they are fashionable. Hoops, however, have a cumbersome side; when Laura walks with Carrie,

...the strong wind blowing against her always made the wires of her hoop skirt creep slowly upward under her skirts until they bunched up around her knees. Then she must whirl around and around until the wires shook loose and spiralled down to the bottom of her skirts where they should be.⁸³

When Carrie questions the practicality of wearing hoops, Laura's reply shows where her priority now lies: "“They are rather a nuisance... But they are stylish, and when you're my age you'll want to be in style”".^{84 85}

Another addition to Laura's wardrobe as she gets older is the corset. Laura does tell Carrie she should be glad that she is too young to wear a corset. Although Laura used to flout the proper wearing of her sunbonnet when she was younger, there is no question of this older Laura refusing to wear her corsets:

⁸² Wilder, L.I. *Little Town on the Prairie*, p.198.

⁸³ Wilder, L.I. *Little Town on the Prairie*, p.199.

⁸⁴ Wilder, L.I. *Little Town on the Prairie*, p.200. Keen to be "in style", Laura not only wears hoops, she also gets name cards (the subject of Chapter 16, pp.138-148), and cuts her hair into bangs, pp.150-151. All of these are done with Ma's consent.

⁸⁵ Caddie Woodlawn and her older sister Clara have a similar conversation regarding the wearing of hoops. Tomboy Caddie remarks on the impracticality and inconvenience of them: "“Good gracious, every time I sit down in hoops they fly up and hit me in the nose!”" to which Clara replies, "“That's because you don't know how to manage them... There's an art to wearing hoops...”" Brink, C.R. *Caddie Woodlawn*, p.224.

Her corsets were a sad affliction to her, from the time she put them on in the morning until she took them off at night. But when girls pinned up their hair and wore skirts down to their shoe-tops, they must wear corsets.⁸⁶

The acceptance of pain, discomfort (corsets) and hampered mobility (hoops) are as much a part of Laura's growing up as are self-denial and self-sacrifice. As she grows older, Laura is expected to take part in the household sewing. For Laura, sewing is a chore that she detests, not only for the skill and concentration required, but also for the fact that it requires sitting still indoors. Although she learns to like "the cosy afternoons of rocking and stitching and talking a little", Laura would still prefer to be outside, or at least able to see or hear the world outside:

Often she was restless in the house. Then she would walk from window to window, looking into a whirl of snowflakes and listening to the wind, till Ma said gently, 'I declare I don't know what gets into you, Laura.'⁸⁷

After Mary has gone blind, there are certain sewing tasks which she can no longer undertake, such as the sewing of two sheets of muslin to make a sheet. This kind of work is painstaking and Laura hates it, but as a young woman she is expected to perform this household duty.

The stitches must be close and small and firm and they must be deep enough but not too deep, for the sheet must lie smooth, with not the tiniest ridge down its middle. And all the stitches must be so exactly alike that you could not tell them apart, because that was the way to sew.

⁸⁶ Wilder, L.I. *Little Town on the Prairie*, p.72.

⁸⁷ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.122.

Mary had liked such work, but now she was blind and could not do it. Sewing made Laura feel like flying to pieces. She wanted to scream. The back of her neck ached and the thread twisted and knotted. She had to pick out almost as many stitches as she put in.⁸⁸

But although Laura wants to scream, importantly, *she does not*. Although she does not want to do the sewing, she does. She is learning to accept the duties expected of her. And even when “[t]he eye of Laura’s needle slipped through a tiny hole in her thimble and ran into her finger...She shut her mouth hard and did not say a word”.⁸⁹ The sewing task is a self-disciplining one on multiple levels, and Laura, like Jo March, learns the art of self-silencing.

Although throughout the series Ma has the final word on what Laura may or may not wear and how she may wear it (for example, Ma gives permission for Laura to wear her Sunday best after church; Ma tells Laura she must wear her own sunbonnet to town; Ma buys Laura her hoops and gives permission for Laura to cut her hair into bangs), in *These Happy Golden Years*, Laura discusses her wedding outfit with Ma, but makes her own final decision. Although Ma expresses some apprehension at Laura wearing a black dress at her wedding, Laura overrides Ma’s misgivings and chooses to wear the black dress. This is indicative of Laura’s maturity and her now being a young feminine woman.

⁸⁸ Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.31.

⁸⁹ Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.31.

In a humorous moment as the newly married Laura and Almanzo are about to drive away to their new home, Laura's youngest sister Grace comes running with Laura's old slatted sunbonnet, calling out anxiously, "'Remember, Laura, Ma says if you don't keep your sunbonnet on, you'll be as brown as an Indian!'"⁹⁰ Ma's influence has obviously sunk into the consciousness of her youngest daughter.

Another sign of Laura's growing up and giving up of her tomboyish ways is her participation in collaborative sewing projects and the socializing that revolves around sewing. In *Little Town on the Prairie*, the chapter "Blackbirds" includes six pages that detail Ma and Laura's sewing of a winter dress for Mary to take to college. The level of detail in the description of the materials and process of making the dress illustrate the amount of work, skill and cooperation required to produce such a garment. It is while working on Mary's dress that Laura has a personally astounding realization:

Laura had not known that Ma hated sewing. Her gentle face did not show it now, and her voice was never exasperated. But her patience was so tight around her mouth that Laura knew she hated sewing as much as Laura did.⁹¹

Laura realises that perhaps Ma was not so different to herself, once upon a time, and that although Ma has disliked sewing all this time, she has carried out her duty so effectively that her true feelings about sewing were not apparent. For Laura, this is

⁹⁰ Wilder, L.I. *These Happy Golden Years*, p.232.

⁹¹ Wilder, L.I. *Little Town on the Prairie*, p.70.

what growing up and ceasing her tomboyish ways are all about – choosing to perform femininity, doing chores she dislikes, and wearing clothes that may be uncomfortable without complaint. Laura is a naturally active girl, but as she grows older, she is expected to behave in a less exuberant manner, and to show self-restraint. On her first day of school in *The Long Winter*, one of the boys, Cap Garland, throws a ball at Laura. She follows her natural instinct and leaps up into the air, catching the ball quite skillfully. Cap is impressed by Laura's catch, although the other boys quickly remind him that "Girls don't play ball". What Laura has shown with her catch, is that although gender convention means girls don't play ball, they are perfectly capable of playing. Even though Cap invites Laura and her friends to join in the game, all of the girls, including Laura, rush into the schoolhouse – none of them are willing to break with gender norms. Laura is both confused and regretful of her actions: "She did not know why she had done such a thing and she was ashamed, fearful of what these girls must be thinking of her".⁹²

Now that Laura is one of the oldest girls in the school, she is expected to stay indoors at recess time while the boys play outdoors in the snow. Laura and her friends watch from the window, as the boys slide in the snow, obviously having great fun:

Laura wished she could go outdoors to play too.

‘I wish we weren’t too big now,’ she said. ‘I don’t think its any fun

being a young lady.’

⁹² Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.68.

‘Well, we can’t help growing up,’ Mary Power said.⁹³

After school and on weekends in *The Long Winter*, Laura spends afternoons sewing and crocheting with her friends Mary Power and Minnie Johnson,⁹⁴ and during summer, in *Little Town on the Prairie* when the boys play baseball during their breaks, once again the girls do not participate:

Nellie worked at her crocheting. Ida and Minnie and Mary Power stood at the window, watching the ball games. Sometimes Laura stood with them, but usually she stayed at her desk and studied... She was almost fifteen now.⁹⁵

The young Laura may have been allowed to shout and raise her voice in play, but having reached the age of fourteen or fifteen, she is expected to show more restraint, and is reminded by Ma of this: “‘Modulate your voice, Laura,’ Ma said gently. ‘Remember, “Her voice was ever soft, gentle and low, an excellent thing in a woman”’”⁹⁶.

By the Shores of Silver Lake

By the Shores of Silver Lake is a particularly significant book in the series as it marks changes in Laura’s life, and a greater emphasis on her self-awareness of her gender and identity. With Mary now blind, and Pa away from the family at the beginning of the book, Laura has new responsibilities, acting as Mary’s eyes and

⁹³ Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.105.

⁹⁴ Wilder, L.I. *The Long Winter*, p.92.

⁹⁵ Wilder, L.I. *Little Town on the Prairie*, p.138.

⁹⁶ Wilder, L.I. *Little Town on the Prairie*, p.74.

helping Ma look after her sisters. There is greater pressure on Laura to put others before herself, to conform to the expectations of femininity and family. Ann Romines even notes that with the publication of *Silver Lake*

...the books began to look different. The earlier books were large and squarish, with generous illustrations. But the last four took on the standard shape, thickness, and print size of novels for adults”.⁹⁷

Correspondence between Wilder and Lane shows that the issue of ageing in relation to the Little House series was a topic of discussion. As Romines points out, in many of the most popular and lucrative U.S. children’s series such as Nancy Drew, the protagonists’ ages were frozen.⁹⁸ The characters did not grow older and continued to have adventures and solve mysteries in a perpetual time warp of recurring holiday seasons, continuing to appeal to the same age group in subsequent generations of readers.⁹⁹ I discuss the reasons and implications of freezing tomboys’ ages in such popular series in the next two chapters.

In a letter from Wilder to Lane in 1938 (as cited in Romines), Wilder was adamant about the necessity of Laura’s growing older, and of keeping Laura as the central character in the series.

Just a word more about Silver Lake. You fear it is to [*sic*] adult. But adult stuff must begin to be mixed in, for Laura was growing up...

⁹⁷ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.139.

⁹⁸ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.139.

⁹⁹ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.139.

I thought I showed that Laura was rather spotted at the time, grown up enough to understand and appreciate grown up things. But at times quite childish... Mary's blindness added to Laura's age. Laura had to step up and take Mary's place as the eldest...

I believe children who have read the other books will demand this one. That they will understand and love it...

We can't spoil this story by making it childish! Not and keep Laura as the heroine. And we can't change heroines in the middle of the stream and use Carrie in place of Laura.¹⁰⁰

The time lapse between *Plum Creek* and *Silver Lake* is the largest between books in the series. The story of *Silver Lake* begins approximately two years later after the end of *Plum Creek*. For the real Ingalls family, it was during this time 'missed' in this gap that their attempts to farm a profitable wheat crop were thwarted by weather and grasshopper plagues, and the fourth Ingalls child, a son named Charles Frederick (Freddie) became ill and died at the age of nine months. Freddie, as indicated earlier, is not mentioned at all in the Little House series; in the series baby Grace is the fourth and youngest child, making her first appearance in *Silver Lake*. Another significant event, of course, was Mary Ingalls' illness which left her blind for the rest of her life. Romines writes, "For Laura Ingalls Wilder, these were painful, charged, and *unnarratable* subjects"¹⁰¹ and the reason for the time gap between the third and fourth books.

¹⁰⁰ Dated 26th January 1938, cited in Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.140.

¹⁰¹ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.142.

The beginning of *Silver Creek* is set at the Ingalls farm in Plum Creek, with all the family members except Laura and Pa sick and weakened from scarlet fever. Mary has been left permanently blind by her illness. The bleakness of this novel's opening is abrupt and strange, in contrast to the more gently positive and upbeat beginnings of the previous books. The reader is told that Laura is now twelve years old, which once again contrasts with the earlier stories, which followed on immediately from one another. Pa's sister, Laura's Aunt Docia, arrives at the farmhouse with a job offer for Pa, to work as a storekeeper, bookkeeper and timekeeper at the railroad project in Dakota Territory. Ma is initially reluctant to leave their farm in settled Plum Creek to go west, but they decide to accept the offer. Pa quickly arranges the sale of the farm and leaves immediately with Docia. Ma and the girls will travel by train to join Pa in a few months, when Mary is strong enough to travel.

Romines tells us that it was Lane who wanted this to be the opening of the book. Although Wilder wanted to show Laura's growing up, she preferred to jumpstart the book in Dakota, with Laura reflecting on past events as the Ingalls women wait for Pa in a Dakota hotel, to bring the readers up to speed.¹⁰² To Wilder, starting the story in Plum Creek in the atmosphere of sickness and farming failures made for an "unpleasant beginning".¹⁰³ Wilder was reluctant to include details of Jack the bulldog's death and of Mary's illness. She also did not want to give emphasis to the family's farming and financial failures, although these were clearly

¹⁰² Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.142.

¹⁰³ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.142,

drivers in the need for the family to make a new start. She insisted, in a letter to Lane: “The readers must know all that but they should not be made to think about it... It is, and will be passed over lightly by the reader in the interest of the new adventure which is already begun”.¹⁰⁴ In the end, though, because of the problems presented by the “unnarratable” events and discontinuities presented by the time lapse, Lane’s preferred beginning was the one adopted for *Silver Lake*. Despite Wilder’s reluctance to write about bulldog Jack’s death, it seems that Rose had her way; the dog does die in *Silver Lake*, of old age, on the day before Pa’s departure from the family. In earlier books, especially when the Ingalls family lived in Indian Territory, Jack has been a male protector of the Ingalls women, as well as a faithful companion to the family. Now with his death and Pa’s absence, Laura realises that her role in the family has become more central; she must actively help Ma, rather than simply rely on Ma to take care of her and her sisters:

Laura knew then that she was not a little girl any more. Now she was alone; she must take care of herself. When you must do that, then you do it and you are grown up...Ma needed help to take care of Mary and the little girls, and somehow to get them all safely to the West on a train.¹⁰⁵

To Laura, realizing that she is grown up means having to take care of others. In this way she becomes a co-carer of family members too young or unable to look after themselves, taking on a role that supports and mirrors that of Ma.

¹⁰⁴ Dated 28th January 1938, cited in Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.142.

¹⁰⁵ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.16.

In *Silver Lake*, another significant event occurs in Laura's life: her parents tell her that they expect her to become a teacher, now that Mary is blind. Ma was herself a teacher before she got married, and she wants at least one of her daughters to follow in her footsteps. Laura is the next in line:

Laura's heart jerked, and then she seemed to feel it falling far, far down...

She could not disappoint Ma. She must do as Pa said. So she had to be a school-teacher when she grew up.¹⁰⁶

Romines suggests that

[a]lthough the phrase does not appear in the titles of the last four books, by now the entire series was beginning to be known (and marketed) as “the Little House books,” and the House was more and more pressingly the container and the context of the series. Laura Ingalls will never spend another night in a wagon, under the stars, as she loved to do as a child. Instead, she must live under the roofs of little houses, and this increasingly domestic context, combined with the conditions of her adolescence, pushes her to ‘choose’ between her parents’ gendered practices and priorities. But – does she really have a choice? As a dutiful daughter in a patriarchal household, she seems to have no option but to *become* her mother.¹⁰⁷

Romines acknowledges, I feel quite correctly (and have shown throughout my chapter), that “[a]lthough these issues are newly intense in *Silver Lake*, they have

¹⁰⁶ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.98.

¹⁰⁷ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.147, my italics.

been important to the series from its beginning”.¹⁰⁸ In *Silver Lake*, Laura meets her cousin Lena, who is uninhibited, boisterous, and enjoys riding ponies bareback (just like Indians!). Lena speaks using slang and enjoys singing bawdy songs while she works and while she plays. With Lena’s encouragement, Laura joins in the singing and the bareback pony riding. Lena declares to Laura, “I don’t want to settle down... I’m not ever going to get married, or if I do, I’m going to marry a railroader and keep on moving west as long as I live”.¹⁰⁹ Lena’s ambitions are in direct opposition to everything that Ma wants for her daughters, and it is not at all surprising that Ma does not approve of Lena and Laura’s friendship. . When the girls return home after a boisterous afternoon riding ponies bareback, Ma is “shocked” at Laura’s disheveled appearance, remarking “I don’t know when Laura’s looked so much like a wild Indian”.¹¹⁰ Lena and Laura’s final conversation before Lena leaves Dakota with her family leaves Laura feeling miserable, knowing that she is powerless to do what she desires, which is to travel west – she is powerless to determine her own fate. She already knows that she must become a school-teacher.

Lena represents the opposite of the life Ma wants for her girls. Lena wants a pioneering life, free of domestic routines. Whether living in a shanty or house, Laura and her sisters must help with the daily performance of domestic chores. Even though the railroad camp is “uncivilized”, Ma ensures that there is civilisation

¹⁰⁸ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.147.

¹⁰⁹ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.42.

¹¹⁰ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.45.

within the current family home. Laura's daily routine is already beginning to match the routine described in Ma's rhyme in *Big Woods*:

On Mondays, Laura helped Ma do the washing and bring in the clean-scented clothes that dried quickly in the wind and sunshine. On Tuesdays she sprinkled them and helped Ma iron them. On Wednesdays she did her task of mending and sewing though she did not like to.¹¹¹

On the eve of her departure from Silver Lake, Lena is openly thrilled to be free of the domestic routines of the house:

'Gosh!' Lena spoke that wicked word boldly, 'I'm glad this summer's over! I hate houses.' She swung the milk pail and chanted. 'No more cooking, no more dishes, no more washing, no more scrubbing! Whoop-ee!'¹¹²

This is the antithesis to Ma's rhyme of *Little House in the Big Woods*. Romines calls Lena "a threatening character" because she opposes the idea of the little house. Moreover, Romines writes:

Lena is clearly a girl, like Laura. But she blurs the line between "men's" and "women's" culture... Lena is a special threat because – *within* the Ingalls family circle – she shows Laura, as the Indian children did, in *Little House on the Prairie*, that there might be another way to be an American

¹¹¹ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.72.

¹¹² Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, pp.100-101.

girl, one that would appropriate some of the freedoms and prerogatives of men's culture.¹¹³

Silver Lake's chapter "The Wonderful Afternoon" provides an interesting interlude for Laura. From the time of their arrival at Dakota, Laura is fascinated by the railroad project and its workers, and on one afternoon, Pa takes her to watch the railroad workers in action. Of course, this excursion would not be possible without Ma's permission. Before she goes with Pa, Ma takes Laura aside to speak "seriously" to her, to make sure Laura knows that this excursion to see the railroad project is a one-off, and that Laura will not forget the gendered behaviour expected of her.

She said that she wanted her girls to know how to behave, to speak nicely in low voices and have gentle manners and always be ladies...It would be all right for her to go quietly with Pa to see the work this once, but she must be well-behaved and ladylike, and remember that a lady never did anything that could attract attention.¹¹⁴

When Laura returns from her wonderful afternoon, Mary remarks, "'I really don't know, Laura, why you'd rather watch those rough men working in the dirt than stay here in the nice clean shanty. I've finished another quilt patch while you've been idling'"¹¹⁵.

¹¹³ Romines, A. *Constructing the Little House*, p.157.

¹¹⁴ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, pp.74-75.

¹¹⁵ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.83.

During the pay dispute at the railroad camp involving Pa and the workers, Laura is at odds with her mother – Laura senses that Pa is in danger, and wants to rush to his defense, but Ma physically restrains her:

Laura ducked under Ma's arm, but Ma's hand clenched on her shoulder and pulled her back.

‘Oh, let me go! They’ll hurt Pa!’... Laura screamed in a whisper.

‘Be still!’ Ma told her in a voice Laura had never heard before.¹¹⁶

For Ma, the gendered boundaries are clear and not to be crossed. As women, she and her daughters cannot step in to defend Pa, even though his life may be endangered.

Silver Lake, in all its transient and busy roughness is exciting to Laura. She is intrigued and stimulated by the “rough railroad camp” (which is how Ma describes it). One of the railroad workers is Big Jerry, who is half French and half Indian. When she first sees him, Laura admires the freeness of Big Jerry and his horse in a way reminiscent of her observation of the Indians in *Little House on the Prairie*: “his snow-white horse wore no saddle nor bridle. The horse was free, he could go where he wanted to go...”¹¹⁷ After having been in Silver Lake for a while, Mary tells Laura she would rather return to Plum Creek, but Laura feels exactly the opposite:

She liked to feel the great wild prairie all around the little shanty. Her heart beat strong and fast... she remembered the sweating men and sweating

¹¹⁶ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.154.

¹¹⁷ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.52.

horses moving strongly through clouds of dust, building the railroad in a kind of song. She did not ever want to go back to Plum Creek.¹¹⁸

Silver Lake, with its high population of transient, working men is a very masculine-identified place. Ma tells Laura that “it would be some time before this country was civilized”.¹¹⁹ It is this very lack of civilisation which is so appealing and exciting to Laura; the unpredictability and roughness is antithetical to the domestic order and routine which Laura knows will structure her daily life as a woman. Ma is happy when Pa secures the family’ new homestead, telling her friend Mrs. Boast: “‘I’ll be thankful when we’ve settled... My girls are going to have schooling and lead a civilized life’”.¹²⁰ For Laura, it seems that settling down and being civilised means following a prescribed, predetermined and routine path.

Laura did not know whether or not she wanted to be settled down. When she had schooling, she would have to teach school, and she would rather think of something else.¹²¹

Although Laura has private ‘idle’ moments during which she takes sensory pleasure in the world, she can never be completely removed from the routine and the duties that now direct her daily life:

Big girl as she was, Laura spread her arms wide to the wind and ran against it. She flung herself on the flowery grass and rolled like a colt. She lay in the soft, sweet grasses and looked at the great blueness above

¹¹⁸ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, pp.93-94.

¹¹⁹ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.74.

¹²⁰ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.159.

¹²¹ Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.159.

her and the high pearly clouds sailing in it. She was so happy that tears came to her eyes.

Suddenly she thought, 'Have I got a grass stain on my dress?' She stood up and anxiously looked, and there was a green stain on the calico. Soberly she knew that she should be helping Ma, and she hurried to the little dark tar-paper shanty.¹²²

Laura is constantly aware of what she 'should' be doing. The tension between the tamed and the wild, what Laura should and should not be doing, is never fully reconciled. She does her best to behave as she knows she should, but her desire to do otherwise is always present. The physical stain on her dress is another reminder of this tension, and her momentary failure to comply.

Judith Butler has stated that "[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being".¹²³ The *Little House* series provides an illustration of this, not only in the depiction of Laura's evolution from tomboy to feminine young woman ("a natural sort of being"), but in the portrayal of her parents, Ma and Pa. From the start of the series, the gendered performances of Ma and Pa reinforce the rigid, regulatory binary frame that structures their roles and behaviour, and makes distinct the difference between male/masculine and female/feminine. Ma and Pa have separate, gender-identified

¹²² Wilder, L.I. *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, p.206. The description of Laura rolling in the grass like a colt is reminiscent of Alcott's descriptions of Jo being like a colt, which I discussed in the preceding chapter.

¹²³ Butler, J.P. *Gender Trouble*, p.33.

daily routines which involve particular tasks and responsibilities. Because they are girls, Laura and her sisters are being trained in the routines of their mother, which they are expected to perform themselves, self-directed and unsupervised, one day. There is no real possibility that Laura or her sisters will grow up to perform outside of the regulatory frames of gender. Sewing and baking will become part of Laura's repertoire of skills; hunting will not. Just as *Little Women* could not end with Jo March growing up to become a happy and fulfilled spinster author (and according to Alcott's descriptions of spinsterhood and the character of Croaker, one would come to conclusion that 'happy' and 'fulfilled' do not fit with 'spinster' at all!), Laura's growing up and marrying is an inevitability.

In the Little House series, tomboyishness is presented as a temporary condition stage that is grown out of. I briefly discussed Caddie Woodlawn's 'decision' to accept and embrace growing up, and to leave her tomboyish ways behind. The tomboy figure shows that gendered behaviour is not 'natural' to all girls, and that for some girls, including Laura, it is an ongoing struggle to learn, accept and perform. But what is depicted as natural and inevitable, however, is Laura's eventual acceptance and correct performance of femininity as she matures – she struggles, but she will succeed, and she will conform.

It is important to acknowledge, however, Laura's ambivalence throughout this process of growing up – we see numerous stolen moments of private pleasure in her physicality and natural surroundings: her absolute joy at sleeping under the

stars, her rolling in the grass like a colt. We also see her disappointment at her family's settling down in town, her sense of regret at being too old to play out in the snow with the boys, her private reluctance to become a teacher. From the descriptions of these and other similar moments, we cannot help but gain a sense of Ingalls Wilder's own ambivalence; Laura does comply with the expected standards of femininity by the end of the series, but the pleasures she gives up in the process, and the propriety and self-denial she must subscribe to are highlighted throughout her story of development: she chooses to stay indoors with the other girls at school and watch from the window while the boys engage in boisterous and physical games that she herself would have joined in with when she was younger; she does not enjoy sewing, but takes on a sewing job to contribute to the family finances; although she repeatedly refuses to wear her sunbonnet correctly in earlier books of the series, by the series' end she is not only wearing her sunbonnet without fuss, she has adapted to wearing hoops and corsets, items of clothing worn for style and modesty, certainly not for practicality – one of the very reasons why she rejected the sunbonnet as a young girl. As a tomboy, Laura is allowed a certain degree of rebellion – this is, in fact, presented as a very attractive alternative throughout the series. Laura's boisterous cousin Lena acts as an agent of temptation in this regard; she embodies the desire for freedom and rebellion which is always present in Laura, but kept increasingly under control as she grows older. The story of Laura's development, told over the seven Little House books, does produce the appearance of a bumpy but inevitable progression towards femininity, producing "a natural sort of being".

In the next two chapters I explore the ways in which adult concerns regarding appropriate representations of gender and sexuality have affected the production of texts and the construction of characters by focusing my critique of tomboy on the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories and Trixie Belden Mystery series.

Chapter Three

The Clue of the Ghost-Written Tomboy (and her Cousin) Part I: George and Bess of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories

The Nancy Drew Mystery Stories is arguably the most successful girls' series of all time. The idea for a series featuring a girl detective, and the character of Nancy Drew herself were conceived by Edward Stratemeyer, who through his "literary syndicate" known as the Stratemeyer Syndicate, was responsible for the creation of many popular children's series, including the Hardy Boys and Bobbsey Twins.¹ The series were written by ghost-writers contracted to the Syndicate, following Syndicate-decreed plot outlines and formulae, and then published under Syndicate-created and -owned pseudonyms.² The first three "breeder" volumes of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, *The Hidden Staircase* and *The Bungalow Mystery*, were published in 1930.³ ⁴ Remarkably, the

¹ Nancy Drew was created by Stratemeyer following the success of the Hardy Boys series, which made its debut in 1927. A list of the children's series attributed to the Syndicate may be found in Billman, Carol, *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate: Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys and the Million Dollar Factory*. New York: Ungar, 1986, pp.157-159. Also see Johnson, Deidre, ed. *Stratemeyer Pseudonyms and Series Books: An Annotated Checklist of Stratemeyer and Stratemeyer Syndicate Publications*, Greenwood Press, 1982.

² See Billman, C. *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate*, pp.22-26.

³ This was a standard practice for series created by the Syndicate: a new series would be launched with the simultaneous publication of three "breeder" volumes, which could be published as a set, and importantly, would form the basis of the series collection. If they sold well, more titles would follow, be 'bred', so to speak. See Billman, C. *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate*, p.25.

⁴ The numbering system of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories differs between US and UK editions. Although the earliest UK editions published in the 1950s followed the US editions' numbering, starting with the picture cover editions published by Collins in 1971, a different numbering system was used, with the series 'starting' at *The Secret of Shadow Ranch* (thus making George and Bess part of the series from the very 'first' story). The original #1, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, was renumbered and published as #73. All subsequent UK picture cover and paperback editions utilise this new numbering system. Both US and UK editions have been available in Australia, which may prove confusing for an unaware Australian reader. There are many numbering differences between

175th and final book of the series, *Werewolf in a Winter Wonderland*, was published seventy-three years later, in 2003. George Fayne the tomboy was introduced in 1931 in the fifth book of the series, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, along with her cousin Bess Marvin, who was portrayed as George's feminine opposite.⁵ George and Bess became Nancy's regular sleuthing sidekicks, and appear in the majority of the mysteries.⁶

In this chapter, I will examine the evolution of the tomboy character of George Fayne and her feminine cousin Bess Marvin over the course of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories' seventy-three year life span. At this point, I must explain why I have chosen to present a detailed examination of the evolution of both George *and* Bess in this chapter. The two characters were introduced to the series as a pair, and as I will show, they function throughout the series as a pair. They are characterised and distinguished primarily by their contrast and opposition to one another, representing the masculine (George) and the feminine (Bess) binary. Their

the US and UK editions; a detailed discussion of the numbering of different editions is beyond the scope of this thesis. An abundance of excellent research on Nancy Drew and the Stratemeyer Syndicate by scholars and fans is available on the Internet. Further information on the UK editions can be found at the "United Kingdom" page of Lea Shangraw Fox's website, *Around the World with Nancy Drew*, <http://www.nancydrewworld.com/english.html>, accessed 1 July 2004. A similar discussion about renumbered British editions of the Hardy Boys series may be found at "A History of Hardy Boys Books Published in Great Britain" by John Preddle, <http://users.arczip.com/fwdixon/hbbrit.htm>, accessed online 10 March 2005. For the sake of consistency and to avoid confusion, in this thesis, unless otherwise specified, any references to Nancy Drew Mystery Stories title numbers will refer to the numbering system of the US editions.

⁵ According to Bobbie Ann Mason, George and Bess represented "mirrors of Nancy's two halves, demonstrating the extreme options open to females – tomboy and fluff-head". *The Girl Sleuth: A Feminist Guide*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1975, p.56.

⁶ In a number of titles, only one of the cousins is present, e.g. In #113 *The Secret Lost at Sea*, Bess is away on vacation with her parents in California; in #119 *The Mystery of the Missing Mascot*, George is away at a tennis clinic; in #145 *The Missing Horse Mystery*, George is a coach at a soccer camp. In such cases, the missing contrasting cousin significantly impacts on the effectiveness of the characterisation of the cousin who *is* present, because the characterisation of the tomboy and feminine girl relies on each character's opposition to the other.

personalities are communicated through the ways in which they respond and react to one another. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the dialogue between George and Bess exists primarily to emphasise their opposition, often with deliberate comic effect. This chapter will demonstrate and analyse the ways in which the representation of the tomboy and her feminine counterpart evolved over the span of the series, and suggest what has driven this evolution. There have been a number of excellent analyses of the character of Nancy Drew which have paid peripheral attention to her sleuthing sidekicks. This chapter will make a contribution towards filling the gap in scholarship by focusing on George Fayne and Bess Marvin, who were very much a part of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories.

Firstly, in looking at the context of the series, I will provide a brief overview of the publishing background of the Stratemeyer Syndicate. In particular, I will focus on specific events within the series' publishing history which had a significant impact on the texts and characters, specifically the tomboy and feminine girl, including the systematic revision of the first thirty-four texts which took place from 1959 to 1976, and the series' change of publisher from Grosset and Dunlap to Simon & Schuster in 1979. Simon & Schuster remained the series' publisher until the final volume in 2003. I will integrate this with textual analysis, examining the portrayal of George and Bess in texts taken from different points of the series.⁷ I

⁷ Since 1986, a number of Nancy Drew spin-off series have been published; my analysis of the tomboy will, however, focus predominantly on the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories as it is by far the most influential out of all the Nancy Drew series. See "Fashioning the New Nancy Drews" by Anne Greenberg, in Dyer, Carolyn Stewart and Nancy Tillman Romalov, eds. *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995, pp.66-72 for further information regarding the production of the Nancy Drew Files spin-off series.

will also carry out a comparative analysis of the original and revised text versions of Nancy Drew Mystery Stories #7, *The Clue in the Diary*, to highlight the deliberate and significant shifts in characterisation of the tomboy and feminine girl that occurred as a result of the revisions.

In 1991, Applewood Books published the first of its *facsimile editions* of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, which reproduced the content, typesetting and illustrations of the original, pre-revision books.⁸ I will argue that the original characterisation of the tomboy which was altered and excised in the revisions is tolerated in the facsimile editions because they are not aimed at a child audience; they are intended to be read by a nostalgic adult audience,⁹ as works written in a particular and *past* time. The tomboy is read as a historical figure, an artifact of a past era, one that can be rationalised as having been created from different values and different social standards.¹⁰ I conclude the chapter with an examination of the Nancy Drew Girl Detective series, newly published in 2004, which has once again reinvented the images of girlhood as represented by George, Bess and of course, Nancy Drew.

⁸ For an account of the process beginning from the idea for the facsimile editions through to their eventual publication, see Zuckerman, Phil. "Publishing the Applewood Reprints" in *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, pp.41-46.

⁹ Zuckerman, P. "Publishing the Applewood Reprints", p.43.

¹⁰ This is why the negative racial stereotypes are 'accepted' or tolerated in the texts as well. Such texts are identified as *not* being 'from now' or 'about now' – they are not supposed to be about 'us' or 'the world as it is'. The implication is that "we know better now". Later in this chapter I will discuss how the packaging of the facsimile editions emphasises the contextual and temporal positioning of the texts.

The tomboy character of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories was diminished and gradually de-masculinised because the figure of the tomboy ceased to be ideologically acceptable in fiction written for children. This came about as the result of two major and interconnected factors. Firstly, the original motivation for girls to want to be tomboys, that is, their resentment of the limitations and expectations placed upon them simply because they were female, continued to lose its strength, from the 1930s when the series began, through to the late-twentieth century, when the series ended. Secondly, the masculine or unfeminine girl represented by the tomboy was no longer a benign figure that merely reflected a phase of growing up as she did previously in ‘books in a series’, as has been discussed in the previous chapters. In ‘series books’ such as the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, the age of characters was fixed, and therefore tomboy characters did not (and could not!) mature – they were not shown to grow out of their tomboyishness and to accept ‘normal’ and ideal gendered behaviour. The female who deliberately performed masculinity had also become associated with an ‘abnormal’ sexuality that was not the compulsory, accepted, assumed hegemonic heterosexuality. This was not a desirable representation of the female in books aimed at children – the figure of the tomboy problematised ideas about gender boundaries and what it meant to be female and feminine. In “Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts”, Barbara Creed suggests that the tomboy is “a threatening figure on two counts. First, her image undermines patriarchal gender boundaries that separate the sexes. Second, she pushes to its extreme the definition of the active heterosexual woman...”¹¹

¹¹ Creed, Barbara. “Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts” in Price, Janet and Margrit Shildrik, eds. *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1999, p.118.

Sherrie A. Inness writes about the ways in which lesbians read and refashion the Nancy Drew texts, drawing out homoerotic elements of the apparently heterocentric texts. Such queer readings can also be problematic and undesirable for publishers and parents concerned with the content and so-called messages coming from children's texts, as they work against the perceived role of children's literature as "an important tool for socializing young people and teaching them cultural mores".¹²

In the Introduction I cited John Stephens, who argues that "children's fiction belongs firmly within the domain of cultural practices which exist for the purpose of socializing their target audience."¹³ This is *precisely* why the figure of the tomboy was gradually diminished in the Nancy Drew series; although the series was produced to entertain, to be popular, to be lucrative and make its producers a lot of money, it still needed to be ideologically acceptable, and the tomboy became a threat to the series' ideological acceptability. This point is demonstrated by the official text revisions of the series, which I will discuss in this chapter. I discuss the compulsory ideological acceptability of children's fiction throughout this thesis. The idea of ideological acceptability is not even always a conscious choice, as Robert D. Sutherland has argued. As this chapter will demonstrate, the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories continually ensured its ideological acceptability by its constant evolution.

¹² *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity, and the Representation of Lesbian Life*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997, p.107.

¹³ Stephens, John. *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. Harlow, Essex; New York: Longman, 1992, p.9.

In her study of children and the media, Karen Sternheimer argues that “[a]dults tend to view children as imitators, sponges who soak up the language, behaviour, and attitudes of the world around them.”¹⁴ The transformation of George and Bess, therefore, was a result of shifts in what was considered ideologically acceptable for presentation to children (who would “soak up” this content) in the seven decades of the series’ life span. For example, Bess’s plumpness was gradually given less emphasis as making fun of fat people became increasingly seen as insensitive and politically incorrect. Bess’s gluttony shifted into a more focused preoccupation with dieting and weight loss. And of course, the tomboy George was made more feminine; sportiness became a safe substitute for overt boyishness (lest the imitator and sponge girls got ideas about actively performing masculinity!). Of course, although the details of what became considered unacceptable or questionable shifted over the different decades of the series’ existence, the underlying heteronormativity prevailed throughout, and continues today.¹⁵

¹⁴ Sternheimer, Karen. *It's Not the Media: The Truth About Pop Culture's Influence on Children*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003, p.181.

¹⁵ Inness writes about the controversy surrounding children’s books and lesbian images in her chapter entitled “Candy-coated Cyanide”, pp.101-127. In reference to children’s books, Inness writes, “since they are written, designed, sold, read, and taught by adults, children’s books present an adultocentric view of the world, which gains legitimacy simply by being presented as “natural” or “real”. When adult writers of children’s books depict only heterosexual characters and disregard lesbians entirely, they are creating a world view that they wish a child or young adult to adopt”, p.108. Inness relates Sutherland’s notion of the politics of assent to her argument, stating “A juvenile book may not make specific derogatory comments about homosexuality, but when it fails to include any gay or lesbian characters, it suggests that homosexuals do not exist...” p.109.

The Stratemeyer Syndicate

Edward Stratemeyer identified and capitalised upon the missing ingredients in children's fiction of the past: action, mystery and adventure.^{16 17} Stratemeyer had been a writer and producer of dime novels before focusing on the business of producing children's series books. Having written a number of very successful boys' adventure series under various pseudonyms, he eventually found himself unable to keep up with publishers' demand for stories. Stratemeyer recognised that his problem was not coming up with ideas, but rather that he could not physically write all the books from his ideas, and so he formed his literary syndicate:

Instead of working feverishly as an author to make a living, why not come up with story ideas and outline the plots, farm out the writing to hungry professionals, and then sell the combined effort to publishers while holding on to all the rights?^{18 19}

¹⁶ The Stratemeyer series had young male heroes pursuing villains, driving automobiles, riding motor boats and piloting airplanes, Billman, C. *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate*, p.6. Most significantly, his heroines were taken out of settings of domestic hardship and familial drama, into exciting adventures that mirrored those of the adventuring, crime-fighting, treasure-hunting males, p.7.

¹⁷ Billman discusses five of the Stratemeyer's series: The Rover Boys, Ruth Fielding, Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, and the Happy Hollisters. A point made by Billman is one often forgotten or ignored by children's literature critics: the importance of readability: "To the cultural and psychological appeals of Stratemeyer's series mysteries can be added one other kind of pull the books have long exerted on readers, their immense readability. Since the Syndicate's products first took hold of the juvenile reading public, critics, educators, and librarians have been quick to point out that their literary value is nil. This assessment cannot be disputed – it is obvious. But the series mysteries get the highest mark when it comes to readability, which counts, too", p.153. The readability, tied in with the addictive quality of formula, predictability and repetition, is what made these series so collectible, and so successful.

¹⁸ Kismaric, Carole and Marvin Heiferman. *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998, p.13.

¹⁹ The exact establishment date of the Stratemeyer Syndicate is unknown; Billman tells us the Syndicate was probably established in 1906, and that its incorporation date is 1910, *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate*, p.21. Kismaric and Heiferman provide the date as 1905, *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*, p.13.

The series were published under Stratemeyer-created pseudonyms and written following Stratemeyer's outlines by ghost-writers who signed contracts agreeing to be paid a one-off fee per book, give up any claim to royalties and to remain anonymous. Stratemeyer was astute enough to realise that "while his real authors would come and go, if they wrote under pseudonyms, their brand names could live on forever".²⁰ Children read, collected and cherished these books, and many grew up thinking that Carolyn Keene (Nancy Drew), Franklin W. Dixon (Hardy Boys), Laura Lee Hope (Bobbsey Twins) and a multitude of others were real and remarkably prolific authors. Children and parents never dreamed that these beloved 'authors' were pseudonyms assigned to products of an efficient assembly line process.

The first Nancy Drew "breeder" books were written by Mildred Wirt Benson.²¹ They were an immediate success, but sadly, Edward Stratemeyer died shortly after their publication. The Syndicate was left in the hands of Stratemeyer's two daughters, Edna Stratemeyer and Harriet S. Adams. In *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook: 60 Years of America's Favorite Teenage Sleuth*, Karen Plunkett-Powell suggests that Edward Stratemeyer's

most notable (and profitable) business accomplishment was the formulation of his literary syndicate. Equally important was his ability, through the syndicate's mass-market publishing approach, to inspire more

²⁰ Kismaric, C. and M. Heiferman. *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*, p.15.

²¹ In all, Mildred Wirt Benson (sometimes known as Mildred Benson or Mildred Wirt) wrote twenty-three out of the first original thirty mysteries. Read an essay written by Benson herself, "Fulfilling a Quest for Adventure" in *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, pp.59-65. A list of books (including non-Nancy Drew series) written by Benson may be found on pp. 247-252.

children to read *purely for pleasure* than any other author to date. In spite of critics who labeled his work “cheap, vile and over-stimulating” and called the production techniques of his empire “the sausage factory approach” Stratemeyer perfected the art of writing tales that mesmerized boys and girls alike.²²

The Stratemeyer Syndicate produced books that unashamedly entertained rather than educated. Plot, suspense, exotic locations and interesting themes were more important than the instruction of characters and readers. However, the series would not have endured as it did had it not adapted to maintain a certain level of ideological acceptability throughout its lifetime, reflecting shifts in social and cultural values. The series was invented, revised and rewritten as necessary, to ensure that its perceived underlying values were by no means abhorrent to the watchful older, concerned portion of the series’ ambivalent audience.

Sherrie A. Inness writes of popular girls’ fiction in her foreword in *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*,

It is too simple to disregard such reading materials as ‘frivolous’ and ‘lacking literary merit.’...such popular reading does constitute one of the most prevalent and important forces that shapes both young minds and old. Thus, if we wish to understand how we are constituted as subjects, popular literature is a vitally important source that deserves our closest scrutiny...For it is in such popular books that we shall discover the

²² Plunkett-Powell, Karen. *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook: 60 Years of America's Favorite Teenage Sleuth*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1993, p.20.

ideological messages that mold and shape us into the individuals that we are.²³

Although seen by many to be formulaic, poor quality reading material, the cultural importance of popular girls' fiction or indeed of any popular children's fiction cannot be underrated. It is precisely because of its popularity that such fiction is overwhelmingly and most significantly worthy of study; these texts were read by the largest amount of children, and are recalled by the largest number of adults – they remain in our consciousness long after we have stopped reading them.

The Secret at Shadow Ranch

George Fayne and Bess Marvin made their first appearance in the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories in 1931 in the fifth book of the series, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*.²⁴ At the time of publication of the original *Shadow Ranch*, it was considered most fashionable and attractive for females to have curled or curly hair, which the original George did not possess. Later in the series, George's hair is described as short, dark and curly, perhaps as a balance to its shortness, to avoid an overly masculine, militant image. In the original *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (1934) George describes herself as “homely” and refers to her “straight hair and pug nose”, all of which suggest she is a plain-looking, not particularly pretty girl. In the revised

²³ Inness, Sherrie A., ed. *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997, p.10.

²⁴ Nancy's friend and sometime-accomplice in the previous four books had been Helen Corning. See Plunkett-Powell, K. *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook*, pp.90-92.

version (1965), renamed *The Secret of Shadow Ranch*,²⁵ George is described by the narrator rather more concisely and flatteringly as “an attractive tomboyish girl with short dark hair”.²⁶

From the beginning, in both original and revised versions, Bess is described as being very different to George. In the original text:

George glanced up at her cousin as though trying to discover the secret of her dignity and composure. Elizabeth was noted for always doing the correct thing at the correct time. Though she lacked the dash and vivacity of her cousin, she was better looking and dressed with more care and taste.²⁷

In the revised text, just as for George, Bess’s introductory description is much more concise, and she is referred to as “the pretty, slightly plump blonde”.²⁸ In later texts, Bess’s plumpness, and the love of food that contributes to this plumpness becomes a central aspect of her characterisation. It is important to note, however, that she is

²⁵ Other volumes that had their titles changed through the revisions are *The Mystery at the Ski Jump* (changed to *Mystery at the Ski Jump*) and *The Password to Larkspur Lane* (changed to *Password to Larkspur Lane*).

²⁶ Keene, Carolyn. *The Secret of Shadow Ranch*. Revised text version. London: Armada, 1979, p.9.

²⁷ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*. Facsimile ed. Original text version. Bedford, MA: Applewood, 1994, p.4. Throughout this chapter where relevant, the abbreviation (RT) will denote the revised text, and (OT) the original text. This is the only time in the series that Bess is referred to as Elizabeth. In the revised text, the reference to Elizabeth has been removed, and Bess is just Bess from the very ‘beginning’. In later texts, Bess is very much a comic character. She is far from dignified and composed, and most definitely does not always do “the correct thing at the correct time” (although she does try!).

²⁸ Keene, C. *The Secret of Shadow Ranch* (RT), p.9.

specifically described as “slightly plump”, suggesting that she is only a little overweight, and therefore not fat.²⁹

In this very first Mystery Story, behaviours and situations that become standard for George and Bess are established. The original George acknowledges that ““everyone says I’m irresponsible and terribly boyish””. She speaks boldly and bluntly, sometimes quite rudely. Out of the three girls, she uses slang most frequently, much to her aunt’s distaste.³⁰ She declares to Nancy’s father that a chaperone will not be necessary for the trip³¹ – at the time of publication, it would have no doubt been considered inappropriate for three girls to travel without an adult chaperone, which suggests the spirit of boldness and outspokenness in which George’s statement would have been made. George openly shows her disinterest in Ross Rogers and scoffs at Nancy’s interest in the man: ““I don’t see anything interesting about him,’ George scoffed. ‘I thought he was sort of stupid’””.³² Later on, following an awkward conversation between Rogers and her aunt, George declares, ““Well, that man is stupid!... Imagine not knowing your own name!””.³³ She is frank in expressing her opinion about people she does not like, referring, with a “contemptuous sniff”, to Zany Shaw, who runs the junk shop in town as ““That relic””,³⁴ and she calls Martha Frank ““an old crab””.³⁵ In later books,

²⁹ It is, however, acceptable for the Hardy Boys’ friend Chet Morton to be fat. He is described unflatteringly throughout the series using a range of adjectives, such as “fat”, “a corpulent specimen”, “stout”, “pudgy” and “fatso”, as cited in Kismaric, C. and M.Heiferman, *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*, p.87.

³⁰ *Little Women*’s tomboy Jo March also used slang, much to the consternation of her sisters.

³¹ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.7.

³² Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.19.

³³ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.97.

³⁴ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.74.

George is impatient, blunt and sarcastic, especially towards Bess, as I will demonstrate in this chapter.

Bess is prone to fretting and does so when the girls reach Chicago Station to find their chaperone has not yet arrived; this prompts George to scold her. Throughout the series, George scolds and teases Bess, whether it is for being greedy, cowardly, foolish or squeamish. Bess, as the feminine girl, is romantic; George the tomboy isn't. After meeting the cowboys at dinner during their first night at the ranch, Bess laments the lack of young, attractive cowboys: "Not one of them is under forty years of age!... Oh, why couldn't one have been young and handsome?"³⁶ Later on, when their aunt suggests the girls attend a dance in town, Bess says, "I hope we meet some nice men", to which George teases, "Your trip will be a failure if you don't capture the heart of at least one handsome cowboy".³⁷

In the group, as the feminine representative, Bess is physically the weakest, and shows little mental fortitude in stressful situations. She is the one who has to be protected and rescued. When the girls and their guide are forced to cross a turbulent river on horseback during a storm, it is Bess who panics, freezes and puts herself into an even more perilous situation. After she has been led to safety by Nancy, she has a chance to reflect on what happened: "Oh, I never was so frightened in all my life!' Bess murmured brokenly. 'When I saw all that water surging about me, I got

³⁵ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.92.

³⁶ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.32.

³⁷ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.108.

dizzy and I couldn't think what I was doing”³⁸ After the incident, Bess is the only one who has caught a cold.³⁹ She is reluctant to participate in physical activity; when the girls have the opportunity to take part in a round-up with the ranch cowboys, she is the only one not enthusiastic about joining in. She tells George: “‘I’d get a dreadful sunburn, and, anyway, if a big ugly steer came at me, I know I’d become panic-stricken. No, I’d rather wait here and watch everything from a distance’”⁴⁰

Bess tires easily, and is usually the first to get hungry. On another horseback excursion into the mountains, it is Bess who suggests they stop for lunch. In later books, this is one of Bess’s standard functions – she is the one in the group who keeps track of and signals the time for mealtimes and rest breaks. At lunch, George teases Bess about the amount of food she has consumed. “‘I’m getting fatter every day of my life,’ Bess complained as she munched a sandwich. ‘This is my third.’ ‘Fifth you mean,’ George corrected her brutally”⁴¹ This kind of exchange becomes a typical interaction between the cousins in later books. Bess’s love of food is not restricted to its consumption. She also loves fantasising about food, and does so when the girls become lost in the mountains. She fantasises about the food they have probably missed for dinner back at the ranch: “‘Maybe baked ham or steak and hot biscuits, coffee...’”⁴²

³⁸ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.45.

³⁹ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.53.

⁴⁰ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.62.

⁴¹ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.78.

⁴² Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.137.

Bess screams when she is startled or frightened; she screams when she spots a lynx and becomes frozen with fear and is of no help to George, who battles to stop their ponies breaking away.⁴³ When the lost girls seek shelter for the night, Bess becomes convinced that a cave they find has a bear in it (despite the lack of physical evidence to support this claim), and tells Nancy, in melodramatic fashion, that she will be killed if she ventures inside.⁴⁴ George is a willing companion for Nancy; together they carry out an inspection of the cave to prove to Bess that it is indeed safe. It is only after their reconnaissance of the cave and a great deal of coaxing that Bess agrees to crawl inside for shelter.⁴⁵ Bess is prone to exaggeration when complaining about her fears, tiredness or other physical afflictions: “‘Sleep!’ Bess wailed. ‘Do you think I could close my eyes with all these wild creatures ready to pounce upon me the minute I did!’”⁴⁶ She is clumsy and inept when attempting on new skills. Not surprisingly, she is no good at fishing, and even less surprisingly, it is George who is her most vocal critic: “‘Bess makes too big a splash when she drops her fly on the water,’ George complained. ‘She might just as well throw a rock and be done with it!’”⁴⁷ Being squeamish and possessing the stereotypical feminine fear of creepy-crawlies, Bess refuses to use “‘horrible, crawly things’” as bait.⁴⁸

⁴³ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.79.

⁴⁴ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.140.

⁴⁵ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.141.

⁴⁶ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.140.

⁴⁷ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.102.

⁴⁸ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.103.

As I will discuss in the following section, the construction of the characters of George and Bess function as part of a sleuthing group dynamic which is based on contrasting group members.

The Sleuthing Group Dynamic⁴⁹

The sleuthing group made popular by the Stratemeyer Syndicate in children's adventure and mystery fiction usually consisted of members with contrasting physical appearance, personality and aptitude. George, Bess and Nancy form a typical example of a sleuthing group.

George, Bess and Nancy are easily identified and distinguished by their contrasting physical appearance. This works on both a textual (through physical descriptions provided within the text) and visual (through illustrations) level. Nancy is blond (later, throughout the series, various shades of reddish blond⁵⁰), Bess is blond but slightly plump, and George has short dark hair (in the original *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, we are told she has "a straight brown bob"⁵¹; later post-revision texts describe her hair as short, dark and curly).

⁴⁹ Refer to the Appendix "Adventure and Mystery Series Group Dynamics" of this thesis for a detailed discussion about the sleuthing group dynamic in children's adventure and mystery series.

⁵⁰ The colour of Nancy's hair has been a topic of interest for sometime. Over the years, it has been described in a number of ways, including blond, strawberry blond, reddish blond, and titian. Karen Plunkett-Powell tries to solve *The Mystery of the Transforming Tresses*, suggesting that the origin of the change may well have been a technical one: "For twenty years, beginning in 1930, Russell H. Tandy illustrated Nancy Drew as a blonde. But between 1950 and 1980 Nancy's tresses went from golden blond to light blond to red to titian and every tone in between. Fans were extremely confused, and many wrote to the publisher for explanation. According to Rudy Nappi, the color production process was responsible for much of this confusion. He began painting Nancy as a blond with a touch of titian, which sometimes darkened in the reproduction process to yellow or red tones. An extreme example of this occurred on the cover of *The Haunted Showboat* (1957), which depicted Nancy as a true redhead", p.50.

⁵¹ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.2.

A hierarchy is evident in the group: as the title character of the series, Nancy is the superior one, the leader and heroine, respected and admired. She is a paragon, a renaissance woman, talented and skilled at just about anything she turns her hand and brain to. George the tomboy is a capable companion for Nancy, but she lacks Nancy's elegance, both physically and verbally. George is rational and practical where Bess is romantic and hyperbolic. Although George is bold and keen, she is physically inferior to Nancy because she has a weak ankle, which she twists on a fairly regular basis, resulting in her temporary incapacitation. In *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, the weak ankle makes its first unwelcome appearance, and George displays unfeminine fortitude and stoicism; although the pain is severe, she stubbornly refuses to accept any help from the other girls. Nancy and Bess, however, insist on supporting George all the way back to the ranch, and when they have reached their destination, it is uninjured Bess, who says "I don't think I'll ever be able to walk again".⁵² While Bess does not possess a weak ankle, she is clearly portrayed as the most feminine and the most inferior member of the group. She is physically weak, easily frightened and tires quickly. She cries or panics in stressful situations. She is gullible and a blabbermouth. Her interests, boys, clothes and shopping distract her from sleuthing and sometimes even using her common sense. Bess loves food (hence her plumpness) and in later texts she grapples with diets. The different personalities and aptitudes of the girls, their different reactions to dangerous or stressful situations, and this underlying hierarchy allows dramatic situations to be set up, the creation of suspense, and of course, thrilling rescues.

⁵² Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.93.

At the crossing of the river incident in *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, George crosses the river quite capably. Bess freezes in fear while crossing. George tries to help Bess across by shouting out instructions to her, but this proves ineffective. It is Nancy who, as the heroine, puts herself in peril to physically lead Bess and her pony across to the bank and out of danger.

The contrasting personalities and aptitudes of the girls are used for comic effect as much as for drama, however. In the original text version, the girls' first riding lesson at Shadow Ranch provides an excellent example of the group dynamic. Bess's natural ineptitude makes her mounting of her horse a hilarious event. After trying to mount the horse from the wrong side,

Bess changed sides, but her second attempt was no more successful than the first. Her foot caught in the stirrup and she could neither extract it nor raise herself to the saddle. To the amusement of the cowboys who had perched themselves on the fence to watch the fun, the horse began to move slowly away, and Bess, hopping along on one foot, began to cry frantically: 'Whoa! Whoa!...' Rescued from this predicament, she insisted upon backing the horse up to the fence and mounting from there.⁵³

Following the hierarchy, George fares much better than Bess, and "though somewhat lacking in grace, managed to vault into the saddle without assistance".⁵⁴ And of course, Nancy has naturally superior skills, and shows elegance that neither of the cousins possesses: "Nancy vaulted lightly into the saddle, and the foreman

⁵³ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), pp.34-35.

⁵⁴ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.35.

nodded in approval as he saw that she was well able to take care of herself”.⁵⁵ The narrator goes on to say, “While Nancy Drew had never taken many riding lessons, it was true that she sat her horse well and rode with confidence and ease. The cowboys had watched her admiringly as she galloped about the field”.⁵⁶ Similarly, when the girls come across a lynx, it is Bess who screams when she sees it.⁵⁷ Nancy uses her superior shooting capability to kill it.⁵⁸ George is neither heroine (Nancy) nor helpless victim (Bess), and instead makes the slightly macabre suggestion that they take the carcass home and stuff it.⁵⁹

Another role played by the cousins in the group dynamic is expositional; they ask questions that allow Nancy to explain her thought process, the significance of her actions, or summarise the progress of the plot.⁶⁰ In #122 *The Message in the Haunted Mansion* (1994) the girls are helping renovate an old mansion, where a series of mysterious accidents has occurred. The latest incident has been a flooded bathroom; Nancy expresses her doubt that the flood was an accident. Bess asks, ““What do you mean?”” When Nancy explains she thinks somebody deliberately turned on the tap, George then asks, ““But who?”” The rest of the conversation

⁵⁵ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.35.

⁵⁶ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.35.

⁵⁷ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.79.

⁵⁸ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.80.

⁵⁹ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.81.

⁶⁰ One of the Nancy Drew ghost-writers, identified only as ‘Carolyn Keene’ gives her writer’s perspective on the characters of Bess and George: “[Bess] She’s the easiest way to inject a bit of humor into the story. We’ve all met people like her. Bess is into guys, food, and clothing. She’s loyal and a sweetie, but she can be completely silly, and she’s wonderful to play against George. George is also fairly easy to write, because she’s such a convenient co-detective. Like Watson, she asks all the right questions on the reader’s behalf...” Keene, Carolyn, “Assuming the Role: Writing the New Nancy Drews” in *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, pp.76. Kathleen Chamberlain suggests that the cousins’ questioning assists in the protection of Nancy’s “mythic status” (that superiority that I have observed), in “The Secrets of Nancy Drew: Having Their Cake and Eating It Too.” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 18, no. 1, 1994, p.9.

between the girls works through the possibilities.⁶¹ Later on, when George and Bess ask Nancy about her suspects, they ask key questions that allow her to once again give step-by-step answers and work through the suspects and their motives: “Do you think the same person who stole the letters and started the fire caused the other accidents, too?” (George)⁶² “Who are your suspects?” (Bess)⁶³ “But how could the kid have gotten inside to start the fire?” (George)⁶⁴ “What about the note, Nancy? ...Who could have left that?” (Bess)⁶⁵ and “Almost everybody’s a suspect...Where can we start?” (Bess)⁶⁶

George and Bess also ask questions that facilitate explanation of some of the more esoteric facts and themes that the Mystery Stories feature.⁶⁷ In #52 *The Secret of the Forgotten City* (1975), before embarking on a trip to the Nevada desert, George asks if there are poisonous scorpions; Bess asks how a scorpion stings. Nancy refers to an animal book to answer their questions. She also tells the girls, reading from the book, how to give first aid to a victim of a scorpion sting.⁶⁸ This foreshadows a near miss with a real scorpion later in the story.⁶⁹ In #123 *The Clue on the Silver Screen* (1995), set at a film festival, the cousins ask a number of

⁶¹ Keene, C. *The Message in the Haunted Mansion*. New York: Minstrel, 1994, pp.22-23.

⁶² Keene, C. *The Message in the Haunted Mansion*, p.70.

⁶³ Keene, C. *The Message in the Haunted Mansion*, p.71.

⁶⁴ Keene, C. *The Message in the Haunted Mansion*, p.72.

⁶⁵ Keene, C. *The Message in the Haunted Mansion*, p.72.

⁶⁶ Keene, C. *The Message in the Haunted Mansion*, p.72.

⁶⁷ Although not written specifically as educational texts, mysteries were often based on or featured interesting themes that would have no doubt fascinated and ‘educated’ some of the readers. The mystery in #33 *The Witch Tree Symbol*, for example, requires the girls to visit Dutch Pennsylvania, where readers are introduced to the food and customs of the Amish; in #27 *The Secret of the Wooden Lady*, readers are introduced to shipping terminology and the production of ship figureheads; #55 *Mystery of Crocodile Island*, not surprisingly, provides readers with information regarding crocodiles.

⁶⁸ Keene, C. *The Secret of the Forgotten City*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1975, pp.27-28.

⁶⁹ Keene, C. *The Secret of the Forgotten City*, p.86.

questions which facilitate explanations of various aspects of the film production process. George asks why a current studio would want to edit old films, while Bess queries the ‘jerkiness’ of Charlie Chaplin’s movies,⁷⁰ and when sound was first used in films.⁷¹ In #147 *The Case of the Captured Queen* (1999), which is set at a chess tournament, George asks questions that allow the names of chess pieces and their particular moves to be explained, which would no doubt inform readers unfamiliar with the game.⁷²

As Nancy’s loyal but clearly inferior sidekicks, the cousins enhance Nancy’s perfection and superiority. They are in constant awe and frequently express their admiration of Nancy’s abilities as a sleuth. In #36 *The Secret of the Golden Pavilion* (1959) Bess coos, ““Oh, you wonderful, wonderful creature to solve this mystery!””, while George proclaims, ““Three cheers for Nancy Drew!””.⁷³ In #38 *The Mystery of the Fire Dragon*, Bess says, admiringly, ““Nancy Drew, you sure are something!””,⁷⁴ while in the revised text version of #14 *The Whispering Statue* we are told that “Bess and George were amazed at Nancy’s deductions”.⁷⁵ In #57 *The Triple Hoax*, the girls travel to Mexico City, where George and Bess are both impressed and relieved that Nancy speaks fluent Spanish.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Keene, C. *The Clue on the Silver Screen*. New York: Minstrel Books, 1995, p.8.

⁷¹ Keene, C. *The Clue on the Silver Screen*, p.17.

⁷² Keene, C. *The Case of the Captured Queen*. New York: Minstrel Books, 1999, pp.15-17.

⁷³ Keene, C. *The Secret of the Golden Pavilion*, in *Three Nancy Drew Mysteries: The Secret of the Golden Pavillion, The Secret in the Old Attic, The Clue in the Old Album*, London: Diamond, 1993, p.183.

⁷⁴ Keene, C. *The Mystery of the Fire Dragon*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1961, p.120.

⁷⁵ Keene, C. *The Whispering Statue*. Revised text version. London: Armada, 1977, p.47.

⁷⁶ Keene, C. *The Triple Hoax*. London: Armada, 1981, p.53.

The Revisions, 1959-1976

From 1959 to 1976, the first thirty-four titles of the Nancy Drew Mystery series were officially and systematically revised.⁷⁷ For the most part, the revised texts were condensed versions of the originals, but in some cases stories were completely rewritten, and the revised versions bore little or no resemblance to the original.⁷⁸

There were a number of reasons for this ambitious undertaking, which was spearheaded by Harriet Adams. Adams believed that the series, now almost thirty years old, needed to be updated to ensure its continued popularity and longevity. A particular aspect of the books which required significant revision was the portrayal of racial stereotypes, which were now considered offensive and unacceptable. Bobbie Ann Mason writes, for example, that in the first eighteen books “there are seventeen Blacks – all servants”⁷⁹ and furthermore, in the 1930s and 1940s “the series treated badly a number of other minority groups, especially Italians (swarthy gangsters) and Jews (scheming snobs)”.⁸⁰ In the 1930s and 1940s when those books were first published, such portrayals of race were considered the norm in the

⁷⁷ A similar undertaking was carried out for the first 38 titles of the Hardy Boys series, an exercise which lasted for 15 years, also beginning in 1959.

⁷⁸ For example, in the original text version of #11 *The Clue of the Broken Locket* (1934) Nancy looks for the real parents of a pair of adopted twins. In the revised text (1965), Nancy and her friends get involved in two mysteries: the search for a lost family treasure, and helping a musician who believes his record company is cheating him out of royalty payments. Similarly, in the original text version of #18 *The Mystery at the Moss-Covered Mansion* (1941) Nancy and her friends investigate strange sounds emanating from a mysterious moss-covered mansion. In the revised text (1971), Nancy, her friends and father go to Florida to help prove the innocence of a friend of Mr. Drew, who has been arrested and charged with sending a truck loaded with explosive oranges into the Space Center at Cape Kennedy.

⁷⁹ Mason, B. *The Girl Sleuth*, p.69. Of those servants, Mason observes, “They speak, grinning, in *Gone with the Wind* language, and they are often unpleasant.”

⁸⁰ Mason, B. *The Girl Sleuth*, p.71.

mostly-Caucasian/Anglo-Saxon mainstream. By the late 1950s, such representations were no longer tolerated, and the series was criticised for this aspect of its content. Bobbie Ann Mason writes,

The racism and snobbery which were an inherent part of the original series because they were an inherent part of the society it mirrored – have been dealt with firmly in the revisions and newer volumes... The new *Clue in the Jewel Box* erases the remark about the exiled queen's suspicious foreign accent, although the plot about the impostor prince and the royal jewels remains. In *The Double Jinx Mystery* a suspicious foreign girl with an olive complexion turns out to be a friend.⁸¹

As well as removing negative racial and class stereotypes, the revisions also modernised dated language and updated identified anachronisms. For instance, Nancy's blue roadster was changed to a blue convertible (and later on became a Mustang), and iceboxes became refrigerators. The books were shortened to a new standard twenty chapters from the original twenty-five, shortened by an average of 40 pages, moving forward at a breakneck pace, featuring skimpier characterizations and much less description.⁸² The age of Nancy, George and Bess was changed and permanently fixed, from sixteen to eighteen. This meant that there would no longer be speculation as to when the girls found time to attend school. They would also be free of age-based driving restrictions in all states, making interstate mystery-solving road trips unproblematic. The fixing of the girls' age was particularly significant as it allowed the series to continue indefinitely, as long as it remained popular – there

⁸¹ Mason, B. *The Girl Sleuth*, p.132.

⁸² Chamberlain, K. "The Secrets of Nancy Drew", p.3.

was no end point to be reached, whether in marriage, motherhood or death.⁸³ The Syndicate had learned the pitfalls of allowing protagonists to age in ‘books in a series’ through its Ruth Fielding series, which had lasted 30 volumes, from 1913 to 1934. The series followed the life of Ruth, who started out as an orphan and matured into a sleuth in Hollywood. The series’ popularity declined sharply after the character of Ruth got married. After the death of Edward Stratemeyer, Harriet Adams decreed a rule that was to be strictly adhered to: none of the main characters in the popular girls’ series would marry.⁸⁴ Carol Billman suggests that Ruth Fielding,

...like so many of the career girl detectives in series books popular during and after World War II, finally got caught in the middle of real-life dilemmas: she was divided between, on the one hand, being an independent career woman (and sometimes sleuth) and, on the other, moving along the course traditionally taken by women to marriage and children. The tomboy or the lady? –as other girls’ books of the 1920s and 1930s framed the question. For Nancy Drew, there is no such dilemma, though the opposition is represented in her series by the detective’s two friends, boyish George Fayne and plump and giggly Bess Marvin.⁸⁵

⁸³ Fixing the girls age at eighteen left them permanently in a place between adolescence and adulthood. In the US, the driving age is sixteen, voting age eighteen and legal drinking age and official adulthood reached at twenty-one. This is of course different to the age milestones in Australia, where adulthood, legal alcohol consumption and voting age are achieved at eighteen. I have chosen to refer collectively to Nancy, George and Bess as “girls”, as they are within the texts, and mean no condescension by the use of the term.

⁸⁴ Plunkett-Powell, K. *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook*, p.109

⁸⁵ Billman, C. *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate*, p.118. “The tomboy or the lady?” is the question asked of most of the tomboys discussed in this thesis at one stage or another.

The freezing of Nancy, George and Bess's ages meant that "The tomboy or the lady?" was a question that would never need to be answered.

In her article "Red, White and Drew: The All-American Girl and the Case of Gendered Childhood", Elizabeth Marshall suggests that the revisions also served to remove concerns regarding the questionable sexuality of the characters. She writes:

Later, the Stratemeyer Syndicate deals with the anxiety about female homosexuality through a more obvious strategy. In the late 1950's, female relationships are generally censored from the revised series. A boyfriend is added to *The Hidden Staircase*, the Turnballs are no longer sisters living alone, and, in the revised *Bungalow Mystery*, Nancy and her friends are not nestled together in little cabins at an all-girls camp. The editorial changes in the books suggest that among other changes made to the series, including stripping Nancy of her independence, any elements suggesting lesbianism were censored from the text.⁸⁶

Marshall argues that children's literature, including popular series fiction exists as a set of educational materials aimed at defining and regulating gendered performances of heterosexuality and identity for young readers. The Nancy Drew mysteries arise as a representational system in which sexual meanings are produced through implicit or explicit didacticism in a way that most often attempts to reproduce heterosexuality as the norm.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Marshall, Elizabeth. "Red, White, and Drew: The All-American Girl and the Case of Gendered Childhood." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 27, no. 4, 2003, p.209.

⁸⁷ Marshall, E. "Red, White, and Drew", p.204.

Marshall likens Nancy Drew to “a sort of cultural paper doll, who can be cloaked in a variety of lessons about gender and sexuality so that she might fit a particular historical moment and its ideas about girlhood and feminine adolescence”.⁸⁸ George and Bess, as representations of the masculine/feminine binary are very much cultural paper dolls themselves. Changes to the tomboy character would serve to distance her from the image of the overtly masculine girl, suggestive of a lesbian. The characterisation of the tomboy and feminine girl underwent noticeable and significant changes, as I will demonstrate in the following analysis.

Comparative Analysis: Original and Revised Text Versions of *The Clue in the Diary*

The Clue in the Diary was originally published in 1932 as the seventh book in the series. It was revised thirty years later, in 1962. The plot of both versions is essentially the same, although in the original text Nancy plays a more direct part in bringing justice to the victims, and the revised text features an additional sub-plot involving mail theft. It is easy to do a direct comparison of the two versions because the texts basically follow the same sequence of events.

The revisions are evident from the very first scene. Both versions begin with the girls conversing as they picnic. The original text begins:

‘Why do you stare at me in such a fascinated way, Nancy Drew?’

Plump Bess Marvin, divining the trend of her chum’s unexpressed thought, smiled good-naturedly and reached for her fifth chicken sandwich.

⁸⁸ Marshall, E. “Red, White, and Drew”, p.203.

She had always maintained that picnics were not intended for persons with delicate appetites.⁸⁹

The revised text begins:

‘A penny for your thoughts, Nancy Drew,’ said George Fayne.

‘You’ve been staring into space for nearly two minutes!’

‘And missing all this good food!’ added blonde Bess Marvin. The slightly plump, pretty girl reached for a third sandwich.⁹⁰

In the original text, Bess reaches for her fifth sandwich; in the revised version, fifth has been changed to *third*. This strikes me as an interesting and deliberate change, and compels me to ask: why was it necessary? The words “fifth” and “third” contain the same number of letters, and so the change would not be part of the condensing of the text. It is far more likely that the number of sandwiches was changed so that Bess did not appear excessively greedy. At the time of the revision of the text, three sandwiches may have been arguably indicative of a healthy appetite, but five sandwiches suggested (negatively) gluttony and excess. The original text builds a picture of Bess as a person aware and not necessarily ashamed of her hearty appetite; she enjoys eating: “She had always maintained that picnics were not intended for persons with delicate appetites”. That statement is completely absent in the revised text. Despite the revision of fifth to third sandwich, the post-

⁸⁹ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary*. Facsimile ed. Original text version. Bedford, MA: Applewood, 1994, p.1.

⁹⁰ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary*. Revised text version. London: Armada, 1991, p.1.

revision texts⁹¹ place a lot of emphasis on, and poke fun at, Bess' plumpness, food fantasies and perpetual dieting.⁹²

In the same excerpt from *The Clue in the Diary*, in the original text Bess is referred to as “plump Bess Marvin”. In the revised text, “plump” is prefixed by “slightly”, and “slightly plump” is now accompanied by the adjective “pretty”. In fact, in post-revision texts of the series, descriptions of Bess use a standard combination of adjectives that the reader comes to associate with her; she is always “slightly plump” or “slightly overweight”, as well as “pretty” or “attractive”, and blonde. In the most recent texts, slightly plump, pretty blonde Bess is often on a diet (really dieting, not just talking about it – I will discuss this in greater detail later in this chapter).

A whole section of descriptive text important to George's characterisation is present in the original but has been completely excised in the revised text:

The thought of George considering a diet made both Nancy and Bess smile, for their boyish friend had often been termed ‘skinny.’ She gloried in her athletic prowess, scoffed at anything feminine, and went to great

⁹¹ When I refer to ‘post-revision’ texts I mean 1) revised versions of texts #1-34, as well as 2) any of the other texts #35 onwards that were never actually revised and were published after the official revision process took place.

⁹² For example, in #43 *The Mystery of the 99 Steps*, while in a restaurant in Paris, Bess announces the spread of food that she plans to order for her dinner: ‘...cream of tomato soup, medium-well-done roast beef, potatoes, asparagus, salad, some cheese, and then fruit’, to which George “looked at her cousin disapprovingly. ‘You’ll be bursting out of your clothes within three days if you eat like that!’ As a compromise Bess said she would not have the soup”, p.76. Bess becomes very much the fat comic member of the group, just like the Hardy Boys’ friend Chet Morton. Refer to the Appendix “Adventure and Mystery Series Group Dynamics” for further discussion on the portrayal and role of the Chet. Of course, Bess is never described as “fat”. The euphemism of “plump” is used as a more acceptable term to indicate a female’s being overweight. The Simon & Schuster books saw a change to Bess and George, which I will discuss further.

lengths to explain to strangers that George was really her name and not a nickname.⁹³

Just as Bess's plumpness is modified, George's "skinny" is changed to *slim*. In post-revision texts, she is also often described as slender. I suggest that skinny has been changed because of its less flattering tone. "Skinny" is also not an adjective associated with femininity. And in a similar way to Bess's standard revised descriptive adjectives, George's new concise description in the revised texts is typically "Bess's slim, short-haired cousin, who enjoyed her boy's name".⁹⁴ The original George blatantly rejects femininity – she scoffs at anything feminine; she is proud of having a boy's name, and it is important to her that strangers are told that it is not short for a feminine name. In the revised text, George's name is given far less significance.⁹⁵ The revised text tells us George has short hair and leaves it at that, while the original text details her (lack of) maintenance of it: "George had cropped her straight dark hair as short as the style would permit, and combed and brushed it as infrequently as possible."

While the more extreme indicators of George's tomboyishness are removed in the revised text, markers of Bess's femininity are enhanced in a number of ways, with the addition of *new* text not present in the original.⁹⁶ Negative characteristics

⁹³ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (OT), p.3.

⁹⁴ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (RT), p.1.

⁹⁵ Incidentally, in the revised *The Secret of Shadow Ranch*, the origin of George's name is no longer part of the text; a reader who with exposure to the revised texts only is therefore deprived of that aspect of George's background/character development.

⁹⁶ So although the RT versions were condensed to twenty chapters, text has also been deliberately added, not just removed.

associated with the feminine, such as physical weakness, fearfulness, whining and crying easily are all additions in the revised text. For example, at the scene of the mansion fire, George comments on the state of her dress after she trips and falls over, a new response from Bess has been added: “‘And I’m nearly suffocated from the smoke!’ Bess said weakly”.⁹⁷ During a confrontation with an impatient truck driver over a dangerously rickety bridge, the original text reads:

‘Don’t g-go any f-faster,’ Bess pleaded, ‘or I’ll l-lose all my teeth.’

The horn continued its loud, unreasonable protest.

‘If he doesn’t stop that I’ll scream!’ George cried savagely. ‘Why do truck drivers think they own the road?’⁹⁸

This scene is modified in the revised text, substituting George’s part in the dialogue with Bess; George’s original “savage” cry is reassigned to Bess, as a teeth-chattering, fearful complaint.

Nancy increased her speed, hoping to leave the impatient driver behind.

But he speeded up, keeping close to the convertible. *Honk! Honk! Honk!*

‘If he doesn’t s-stop that, I’ll s-scream!’ Bess complained. ‘And if we g-go any faster, I’ll l-lose all my teeth.’⁹⁹

George no longer takes part in that dialogue. In fact, three difference descriptors of forceful expression from George are no longer present in the revised text:

⁹⁷ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (RT), p.10.

⁹⁸ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (OT), p.59.

⁹⁹ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (OT), p.40.

“savagely”, “angrily” and “stormed”. An additional expression of fear from Bess is added in the revised text, as the girls drive through the dense woods:

Bess shivered. ‘The wildest section in the county!’ she exclaimed nervously. ‘Just the sort of place a criminal would choose for a hideout. For goodness sake, Nancy, step on the gas!’¹⁰⁰

The revised Bess cries more easily than the original; while at the Swensons’ cottage, the sad plight of Mrs Swenson and her daughter are revealed, and the response from Bess in the revised text is not present in the original: “Bess, to hide tears that were gathering, walked into the kitchen.”¹⁰¹ While the three girls wait for Mrs. Raybolt to arrive at the Maplecroft Inn, the revised text reads: “But after an hour had elapsed, the wealthy woman still had not arrived. Bess gave a huge sigh. ‘I’m starved! We may as well have luncheon. I don’t believe Mrs. Raybolt is coming’”.¹⁰² Bess’s huge sigh and additional complaint of “‘I’m starved’” are additions to the original text.

When Nancy tells the cousins she may need them that night to accompany her on more sleuthing, in the revised text George tells her “‘I’ll stick by you, Nancy’”. Bess, however, is more interested in boys and her beauty regimen. Bess initially says she planned to shampoo her hair. She then asks Nancy to get the mystery solved soon so she can catch up on a few things... “‘Well, I’ve postponed a

¹⁰⁰ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (RT), p.66.

¹⁰¹ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (RT), p.45.

¹⁰² Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (RT), p.62.

nice date three times already... I want to go out with Jeff Allen tonight, but I'll put it off again..."¹⁰³ The revision slips in a reference to Bess's dating interest.

In the original text, after a hard day's sleuthing work, the girls all go to a country club dance in the evening:

Nancy had always been popular and on this particular night she did not lack dancing partners. Bess fared well also, but *George was too blunt and boyish to captivate the young men*. However, she did not mind sitting out a few dances, declaring that she preferred it to having her new silver pumps ruined by awkward youths.¹⁰⁴

In the revised text, instead of the three girls attending a dance and George being "too blunt and boyish to captivate the young men", Nancy goes to a dinner dance with Ned Nickerson.¹⁰⁵ At this party, she meets Roberts, whose father is a postmaster, relevant to the development of the new mail theft sub-plot. The same connection could have been easily made at a country club dance (or any sort of dance that all three girls could have attended), so it is interesting that they chose to change the situation completely in the revised text. Of course, the insinuation that George was too boyish (too *masculine*, in the text) to attract young men at the dance was too disturbing to be kept in the revised text. The revision though, gives another opportunity for Bess to show her interest in boys and dating:

¹⁰³ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (RT), p.129.

¹⁰⁴ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (OT), p.118, my italics.

¹⁰⁵ Nancy meets Ned Nickerson for the first time in *The Clue in the Diary*. He becomes her boyfriend and appears in a number of mysteries. He is also her beau in the spin-off series the Nancy Drew Files, and appears (reinvented) in Nancy Drew Girl Detective. Later on, the Syndicate added boyfriends for Bess and George, and in a number of mysteries all six of them take part.

The cousins were intrigued when Nancy told them about the dinner dance.

‘Lucky you!’ said Bess, pretending to pout. ‘Couldn’t Ned have found a couple of blind dates for George and me?’¹⁰⁶

In the original the *Secret at Shadow Ranch*, the girls tease Bess about her romantic notions, but it is in the revised texts that her romantic interests are given more emphasis.¹⁰⁷

The reader of the post-revision text is deprived of more detailed characterization of George Fayne the tomboy. Indeed, much of the characterization of George *as* the tomboy has been diminished in the post-revision text. In the original text, George deliberately performs tomboyishness; we are told she scoffs at anything feminine, and that she chooses to leave her hair unbrushed.¹⁰⁸ She is portrayed as blunter, grottier, and less physically attractive. George’s impatient and passionate reactions to conflict have been rewritten or removed in the revised text, which decreases the overall impression of her aggressiveness and forcefulness, which would have been considered masculine or at the very least non-feminine traits. The revised text no longer blatantly mentions George’s non-attractiveness to young men, and her unperturbed acknowledgement of this. Just as George’s

¹⁰⁶ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Diary* (RT), p.82

¹⁰⁷ In #53 *The Sky Phantom*, for example, a sub-plot has Bess torn between a cowboy and her regular boyfriend Dave.

¹⁰⁸ Judith Butler, as discussed in Chapter Two, writes about gender as a performative corporeal style: “Consider gender, for instance, as a *corporeal style*, an ‘act’ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning”, from “Bodily Inscriptions” in Price, Janet and Margrit Shildrik, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. 1999. Routledge: New York, pp.419-420.

boyishness and non-feminineness is diminished in the revised text, Bess's feminine qualities are enhanced. Revised Bess cries more easily. Her interest in her appearance, boys and dating are given more emphasis. She is more easily frightened, not physically strong and complains more. In the revised text, she becomes the epitome of the pathetic, soft, weak, feminine stereotype.

The character of Bess is much more than a comical foil for George. She is a representation of particular constructions of the feminine. Bess as the shopper and consumer reflects and reinforces the female position in capitalist patriarchal society, where the male is seen as the earner and the woman is seen as the shopper or spender.¹⁰⁹ ¹¹⁰ Bess's struggle with her appetite and diets reflects twentieth century (and especially late-twentieth century) American girls' preoccupation with being thin and body image.¹¹¹ So-called feminine qualities are portrayed rather negatively through the character of Bess. Her body is not a disciplined one; it is overweight and has an appetite for food that she struggles to control. Bess's lack of self-discipline, and a strong desire to buy and beautify leads directly to the girls' involvement in mysteries. In #6 *The Secret of Red Gate Farm*, Bess buys a vial of

¹⁰⁹ In *Reading the Popular*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989, p.22, John Fiske writes: "The deep structure of values that underlies patriarchal capitalism now needs to be extended to include earning as typically masculine, and, therefore, spending as typically feminine. So it is not surprising that such a society addresses women as consumers and men as producers." Fiske summarises the value structure, which associates 'The Masculine' with Public, Work, Earning, Production, Empowered and Freedom, and 'The Feminine' with Private (domestic and subjective), Leisure, Spending, Consumption, Disempowered, Slavery.

¹¹⁰ Also refer to Frost, Liz "Teenage Consumers and Body-Hatred" in *Young Women and the Body: A Feminist Sociology*, A Feminist Sociology. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, which discusses the relationship between consumption and the teenage girls as consumers.

¹¹¹ See Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. New York: Vintage, Random House, 1998, especially Chapter Four, "Body Projects" pp.97-137. In this book, Brumberg explores the history of changes to the body image of girls, and looks at why more than ever, with today's sexual freedom and consumerism, girls are dissatisfied and obsessed with their body image.

expensive and very distinctive perfume, which leads to a case of mistaken identity and of course, a mystery, and in #23 *The Mystery of the Tolling Bell*, she buys cosmetics from a street vendor in spite of the warnings from Nancy and George, that the products are of questionable quality.

Post-revision George and Bess

The post-revision texts (#35 onwards) introduce George and Bess with an emphasis on their contrasting appearance and personality, as well as their *attractiveness*. In #43 *The Mystery of the 99 Steps* (1966): “Blonde Bess’s warm smile revealed two dimples. George, with close-cropped dark hair, was slim and athletic – the exact opposite of her slightly plump cousin”.¹¹² In #44 *The Clue in the Crossword Cipher* (1967): “Bess, a blonde with attractive dimples, was slightly overweight and always being teased about it. Her slogan was, ‘I’ll start dieting tomorrow’ ...George was the antithesis of her cousin. She was an attractive brunette with a slender figure, and was interested in many sports”.¹¹³ And in the revised #27 *The Secret of the Wooden Lady* (1967): “Bess and George were cousins, but there any likeness ended. Bess, blonde and pretty, had a penchant for second desserts and frilly dresses. She shared Nancy’s adventures out of deep loyalty to her but was constantly fearful of the dangers involved. ...George was as boyish as her name. Her hair was dark, her face handsomely pert. George wore simple clothes and craved adventure”.¹¹⁴ George is no longer skinny – she is slim and slender, athletic and attractive. Her hair is short but we are told, attractively styled. Bess is plump,

¹¹² Keene, C. *The Mystery of the 99 Steps*. London: Armada, 1987, p.9.

¹¹³ Keene, C. *The Clue of the Crossword Cipher*. London: Armada, 1977, p.20.

¹¹⁴ Keene, C. *The Secret of the Wooden Lady*. Revised text version. London: Armada, 1989, p.24.

but also attractive and pretty. It seems that in these post-revision texts, a pleasing physical appearance is essential for its main characters.

The post-revision Bess's relationship with food is probably the most prominent aspect of her character. She fantasises about food, takes great pleasure in eating and ensures that mealtimes are not forgotten while sleuthing. Bess' voracious appetite is tempered by diets and of course, the watchful eye and criticism of her cousin George. It seems that George does not waste any opportunity to ridicule or chastise her cousin, verbally and with disapproving looks; much of George's interaction with her cousin revolves around reprimanding Bess for her weight, gluttony and eating habits. In #45 *The Spider Sapphire Mystery* (1968):

Bess ordered two kinds of fruit, soup, baked fish, and a whipped cream dessert.

‘If all you do is sit in a plane and sleep and eat, they’re going to charge you for being overweight,’ George teased her.

Bess endeavoured to defend herself and finally told the waitress she would skip dessert.¹¹⁵

Later on during the mystery, the girls attend a grand buffet dinner, complete with whole roasting pigs and chefs in attendance. “Bess was ecstatic and started to heap her plate. One dark glance from George and she put back a luscious-looking pork chop”.¹¹⁶ In *The Clue in the Crossword Cipher*, when Bess remarks that she will burst after another big meal, George looks at her cousin disapprovingly and tells

¹¹⁵ Keene, C. *The Spider Sapphire Mystery*. London: Armada, 1989, p.58.

¹¹⁶ Keene, C. *The Spider Sapphire Mystery*, p.105.

her: “‘If you have a tummy-ache tonight, enjoy it by yourself!’” which causes Bess to fall silent.¹¹⁷ George’s constant vigilance over her cousin’s behaviour reflects the way in which society, through the media, advertising and other forms of discourse perpetuates a culture of female self-monitoring and questioning of food consumption. Bess rarely has an effective comeback to George’s criticisms; she is fighting a constant and losing battle.

Bess even packs food in case of emergency. Just like Chet Morton in the Hardy Boys series, she appears to have a fear of hunger. In *The Spider Sapphire Mystery*, the group of Nancy, George, Bess, Burt and Dave find Ned, who has been missing. When the rescued Ned says that he is hungry, Bess is pleased to be able to supply biscuits and candy that she has had packed in her handbag.¹¹⁸ In #37 *The Clue of the Old Stagecoach* (1960), the girls are able to take a rest from sleuthing and sit down to a picnic lunch of roast beef sandwiches, tomatoes and cake because Bess had the foresight to ask the camp chef to pack them a lunch before setting out for the day.¹¹⁹ And of course, it is Bess who announces when it is time for a rest and lunch, precisely at noon.

George’s teasing and chiding of Bess is not limited to her appetite; she also ridicules her weight. In the revised version of #6 *The Secret at Red Gate Farm* (1961) George is bitten by a snake, and so Nancy and Bess carry her back to the

¹¹⁷ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Crossword Cipher*, p.67.

¹¹⁸ Keene, C. *The Spider Sapphire Mystery*, p.45.

¹¹⁹ Keene, C. *The Clue of the Old Stagecoach*. London: Armada, 1978, p.108.

farmhouse. During this journey, George somehow manages to fit in a jibe about Bess's weight:

The trip, though awkward and slow, went at a steady pace. George maintained her Spartan attitude. She not only refused to complain but teasingly asked Bess, 'Aren't you glad I don't eat as much as you do?'

'I don't know what you mean,' Bess replied, puzzled.

'Well, if I loved desserts as you do,' George teased, 'I wouldn't be such a featherweight to carry!'

Bess gave her cousin an indignant glance. 'How do you like that for gratitude! Next time I lug you all the way home - !'¹²⁰

In #57 *The Triple Hoax* (1979), while the girls shop for clothes, George embarrasses Bess by asking a shop assistant if they carry "chubby sizes".¹²¹ In #58 *The Flying Saucer Mystery* (1980), as the group of campers set off on their trip, Bess comments that if it rains, she will be "wetter than a guppy". Of course, this leads to an unkind retort from George of, "'You mean a whale!'".¹²²

George thrives on tormenting Bess, even in times of stress and potential danger. In *The Clue in the Old Stagecoach*, the girls are trapped in their car while a curious bear lurks outside. Nancy spots a collar around the bear's neck and suggests that their furry assailant might be tame. "George grinned. 'You mean he's lonely and wants to crawl in here with us?' She pretended to open the door, whereupon

¹²⁰ Keene, C. *The Secret of Red Gate Farm*. Revised text version. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1961, p.134.

¹²¹ Keene, C. *The Triple Hoax*, p.59.

¹²² Keene, C. *The Flying Saucer Mystery*, p.3.

Bess gave one of her loudest screams”.¹²³ George makes fun of Bess’s squeamishness in *The Message in the Hollow Oak*. Having returned from an archaeological dig, George is excited with her find of pearls which may have once belonged to a necklace. Bess asks, horrified,

‘You mean... that there was once a neck inside of those pearls?’

George could not resist teasing her cousin. ‘That’s right. The lady’s head and neck were dug up first.’

‘Ugh! How can you enjoy such gruesome things?’ Bess remarked, and returned to the kitchen.¹²⁴

George even acknowledges her tormenting of Bess in #59 *The Secret in the Old Lace* (1980). In Belgium, Bess’s handbag falls into a canal ““Oh no... There go all my lipsticks and nail polish!””¹²⁵ Bess is relieved when the handbag is successfully retrieved, but George doesn’t let her off so easily. ““You and your makeup,’ her cousin needled her. ‘Why wear rouge at all when you know I can keep your blood pressure sky-high!’””¹²⁶ Sometimes, George’s remarks are amusing, but in most cases they are both mean and unnecessary. In later mysteries published by Simon & Schuster this meanness is toned down somewhat. The cousins still banter and argue, but George’s remarks are less negative, less sarcastic, and sometimes even said with an affectionate smile.

¹²³ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Old Stagecoach*, p.77.

¹²⁴ Keene, C. *The Message in the Hollow Oak*, pp.151-152.

¹²⁵ Keene, Carolyn. *The Secret in the Old Lace*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1980, p.64.

¹²⁶ Keene, C. *The Secret in the Old Lace*, p.65.

Just as in the pre-revision texts, Bess is romantic, while George is practical. In *The Secret in the Old Lace*, Bess fantasises about secret love messages hidden in lace: “I can just imagine a young woman spending endless hours weaving a message for Francois like “I must meet you soon in the garden of my home.” Or, “A moonlit night would be best””.¹²⁷ George, on the other hand, reflects on the popularity on lace collars or ruffs in seventeenth-century Europe: “I’d hate to wear one of those. They must have been very hot and uncomfortable””.¹²⁸ Bess is the vain, impractical one who neglects to wear suitable shoes for walking in the woods, in *The Spider Sapphire Mystery*.¹²⁹ As the practical cousin, George does not believe in ghosts, and expresses this on a number of occasions, such as in #19 *The Quest of the Missing Map* (1969) and #6 *The Secret at Red Gate Farm* (1961). George is not superstitious, and in the #52 *Secret of the Forgotten City* (1975) she is sceptical when told by a Native American woman that a particular necklace will cause illness if worn by a white woman. George says: “Such beliefs belong to witchcraft and things like that. Sensible people don’t believe in all those signs and omens Man makes up””.¹³⁰

The revised Bess is very much the comic character of the group. The series uses situations with animals to create some comical moments with Bess. She is shown no respect by the animals she encounters. In *The Clue in the Crossword Cipher*, Bess wants Nancy to take a photograph of her on an alpaca, but as soon as

¹²⁷ Keene, C. *The Secret in the Old Lace*, p.96.

¹²⁸ Keene, C. *The Secret in the Old Lace*, p.97.

¹²⁹ Keene, C. *The Spider Sapphire Mystery*, p.42.

¹³⁰ Keene, C. *The Secret of the Forgotten City*, p.109.

she sits on the animal, the alpaca bends its knees and sits down in the roadway. Bess scolds and slaps the animal, but it refuses to budge. The alpaca's owner suggests that Bess must weight more than a hundred pounds, the limit of an alpaca's burden. Bess dismounts and instantly changes the subject.¹³¹ In *The Secret at Red Gate Farm*, Bess encounters a (she says, "vicious") cow that refuses to cooperate, during her first milking lesson.¹³² In the revised version of #22 *The Clue in the Crumbling Wall* (1973), the girls climb over a wall to access the grounds of Heath Castle. With their calm and confident demeanour, Nancy and George are able to befriend the guard dogs, but as soon as Bess's head appears over the wall, a reader familiar with the series would not be surprised that the dogs begin to snarl at her, making her too frightened to continue.¹³³ This allows the group to split up, leading to more exciting developments. When the villain makes an appearance at the site, Bess valiantly tries to find the others to warn them. However, the dogs have not forgotten her, and Bess ends up trapped up a tree.¹³⁴

Just as she is in their very first mystery, George is a reliable sidekick for Nancy most of the time. In #42 *The Phantom of Pine Hill* (1965), Nancy gets trapped in a workshop, and it is up to the cousins to rescue her. George remains level-headed and focused on the task, trying all kinds of tactics to free Nancy, whilst Bess cries.¹³⁵ Not surprisingly, the cousins have opposing attitudes to

¹³¹ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Crossword Cipher*, p.113.

¹³² Keene, C. *The Secret of Redgate Farm* (OT), p.75.

¹³³ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Crumbling Wall*. Revised text version. London: Armada, 1985, p.54.

¹³⁴ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Crumbling Wall*, p.61.

¹³⁵ Keene, C. *The Phantom of Pine Hill*, in *Three Great Nancy Drew Mysteries: The Clue of the Tapping Heels/The Mystery of the Tolling Bell/The Phantom of Pine Hill*. London: Dragon, n.d., pp.403-404.

mysteries. In *The Clue in the Crumbling Wall*, after Nancy tells the cousins about the mystery to be solved at Heath Castle, George's response is enthusiastic ('What are we waiting for? Why not go there right away and explore the place?') while Bess's response is cautious ('Will it be safe?').¹³⁶ Bess is not a very good sleuthing sidekick and is reprimanded by George for this. In *The Ghost of Blackwood Hall*, Bess tells a woman on the plane that she and her friends are going to New Orleans, and even shares the name of the hotel they plan to stay at. When they reach their destination, George scolds her: "'You'll never learn to be a detective, Bess... You can't tell who that woman on the plane might be'".¹³⁷

One of Bess's standard roles as the feminine girl is as expresser of appreciation for beauty, whether in clothing, environment, decoration or architecture. She comments on the "exquisite azaleas" in *The Haunted Showboat*,¹³⁸ and admires the wonderful pine scent and wild flowers in *The Flying Saucer Mystery*.¹³⁹ In *The Mystery of the Tolling Bell*, when the girls visit a candle maker's shop, Bess is impressed by the display of colorful candles: "'Doesn't it remind you of a rainbow?' gasped Bess in delight".¹⁴⁰ Her *jouir de vivre* is expressed with much enthusiasm on a shopping expedition in *The Secret in the Old Lace*:

'I just love New York,' Bess swooned, gazing into the window of an Italian dress boutique. 'The clothes are gorgeous, the people are gorgeous –

¹³⁶ Keene, C. *The Clue in the Crumbling Wall* (RT), p.17.

¹³⁷ Keene, C. *The Ghost of Blackwood Hall* (RT), p.25.

¹³⁸ Keene, C. *The Haunted Showboat*. London: Armada, 1981, p.42.

¹³⁹ Keene, C. *The Flying Saucer Mystery*, p.5.

¹⁴⁰ Keene, C. *The Mystery of the Tolling Bell*. Revised text version. London: Armada, 1979, p.90.

' She paused to stare at a sleek, black-haired girl in the shop. She was wearing a fine lemon-colored knit suit. 'Boy, I wish I could look like that.'

At this point, the moment is spoiled by George's sarcasm:

George nudged her cousin away from the window. 'You could if you stopped eating!'

Bess pretended not to hear the remark.¹⁴¹

Although George is portrayed as a much more capable and calm person than Bess, she is very much kept in her place in the group hierarchy by a harrowing experience in #30 *The Clue of the Velvet Mask* (1969), when she masquerades as Nancy Drew as part of a plan to capture a gang of robbers who have been targeting costume parties. The decoy operation goes awry and George-as-Nancy is abducted by the gang. Disappointingly, George is not at all heroic, but is instead completely traumatised by her ordeal. Her reaction is more like what we would expect from Bess. When George is rescued, her behaviour is uncharacteristic of the George we have come to know: she weeps hysterically on Nancy's shoulder.¹⁴² In a strange, almost disconcerting reversal of roles, Bess is eager to accompany Nancy on the investigation, while George is apprehensive: "George twisted her hands nervously. 'Don't do it!' she pleaded. 'Anything you girls might learn isn't worth the risk'".¹⁴³ Nancy and Bess ignore George's pleadings, leaving her to fret at home. This is quite a change to *The Clue in the Crumbling Wall*, for example, where it is Nancy

¹⁴¹ Keene, C. *The Secret in the Old Lace*, p.54.

¹⁴² Keene, C. *The Clue of the Velvet Mask*. Revised text version. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1969, p.64.

¹⁴³ Keene, C. *The Clue of the Velvet Mask* (RT), p.142.

and George who leave Bess waiting alone while they go investigating. In *The Clue in the Velvet Mask* Nancy and Bess are captured, and it is only at the eleventh hour (for great suspense and dramatic effect, no doubt) that George comes to her senses and provides information that leads to their rescue and the solving of the case. This whole plot is not particularly convincing; here is an example of what happens when series fiction deviates from its formula – the reader's expectations are not met, and the story stands out as ineffective or implausible. George explains to the others:

‘...after those kidnappers drugged me, I seemed to lose my nerve. That woman's words just burned into my brain. She warned me that if I didn't make Nancy drop the case, great harm would come not only to her but to Mrs. Gruen and Mr. Drew and my family and Bess's’.¹⁴⁴

This seems like an over-reaction; after all, a standard element of Nancy Drew mysteries is the anonymous threat or ominous warning to stay off the case, and by the time of *The Clue of the Velvet Mask*, the thirtieth mystery, no doubt George, Bess and Nancy would be as familiar with this element of the formula as the readers! The girls have dealt with all sorts of warnings conveyed through various menacing means; in #14 *The Whispering Statue*, for example, burly masked men break into the Drew house and interrupt dinner. In that case, the girls refused to be intimidated and continue with the investigation. The feeble state George is left in after her abduction in *The Clue of the Velvet Mask* is more characteristic of Bess. But one would presume that Bess could not have masqueraded as Nancy because of her slightly plump figure.

¹⁴⁴ Keene, C. *The Clue of the Velvet Mask* (RT), p.154.

The contrasts between George and Bess, the resulting banter between them and their different responses to different situations form a significant component of their characterisation. George's tomboyishness has little significance in the narratives other than being the feature which distinguishes her from Bess and drives much of their dialogue. The tomboy construct in the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories does not reflect on being or becoming more feminine; as I will discuss in the next section, the later books in the series continue with the contrasts between George and Bess.

Simon & Schuster, 1979-2003

In "The Secrets of Nancy Drew: Having Their Cake and Eating It Too", Kathleen Chamberlain suggests that

...when Simon & Schuster took over complete production of the series in the mid-1980s, the stories became more contemporary; they featured plots dealing with current issues such as weight loss and fitness and offered fewer gender-specific occupations. The earlier books had rarely, if ever, focused on specifically adolescent problems.¹⁴⁵

The change of publisher in 1979 from Grosset and Dunlap to Simon & Schuster¹⁴⁶ had a dramatic effect on the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories series. Over time, the

¹⁴⁵ Chamberlain, K. "The Secrets of Nancy Drew", pp.2-3.

¹⁴⁶ Grosset & Dunlap argued that the Stratemeyer Syndicate was violating contract terms by changing publishers, and took the Syndicate to court. The trial became famous for the testimonial of Mildred Wirt Benson, in which it was revealed that she was the original author of Nancy Drew, not Harriet Adams, as it had been widely believed. The outcome of the trial gave Grosset and Dunlap the rights to publish the first 56 titles, both original and revised (later on, Applewood Books came to an agreement with Grosset and Dunlap for permission to publish the facsimile editions of the original texts), and Simon & Schuster was given the rights to the publication of all future Nancy

books were further shortened, with the latest titles having fifteen or sixteen chapters; #113 *The Secret Lost at Sea* had only fourteen chapters.

The publishing schedule changed, and the rate at which new titles were churned out was increased. As Geoffrey S. Lapin writes,

When the publishing of the Nancy Drew mystery stories shifted from Grosset and Dunlap to Simon & Schuster in 1979, a change in publishing schedule occurred which was not unlike that used when the series began in 1930; more than one Drew title was to be published annually, 1980 boasted three new books; 1981 had four; 1982 five, followed by three each for both 1984 and 1985.¹⁴⁷

This demand was driven by urgency to capitalise on the boom in children's publishing, with the rapid growth of bookstore chains in the 1970s and 80s.¹⁴⁸ Simon & Schuster's aim was to get the mass-produced paperback books out onto the shelves as quickly as possible.¹⁴⁹ Katherine Chamberlain suggests that the mysteries published in the late 1950s when the revisions took place "move forward

Drew titles. See "The Carolyn Keene Trials: Will the Real Ghost of Nancy Drew Please Stand Up?" in Plunkett-Powell, K. *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook*, especially pp.28-29.

¹⁴⁷ Lapin, Geoffrey S. "The Outline of a Ghost." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 18, no. 1, 1994, p.64.

¹⁴⁸ Haugland, Ann. "The Crack in the Old Canon: Culture and Commerce in Children's Books." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 18, no. 1, 1994, p.50.

¹⁴⁹ Haugland suggests that part of Simon & Schuster's drive was motivated by the success of its Silhouette line of romance novels for women. This led to the creation of spin-off series such as the Nancy Drew Files (1986-1997, 124 titles), which were a cross between a mystery and a romance novel, minus the sex, of course. Haugland writes, "It is reasonable to suggest that the success of its series books for adult women encouraged editors at Simon & Schuster to develop similar lines for girls. By the mid-1980s, Simon & Schuster had an aggressive publishing program that involved several Nancy Drew lines designed both visually and in terms of plot and character to sell to consumers – to the girls who read them..." , p.50.

at a breakneck pace and have skimpier characterizations”.¹⁵⁰ This is even more so with the Simon & Schuster paperbacks – differences that make the characters distinct from one another are named, but of course there is little development or exploration of the motivation behind the characters’ interests and aversions.

In the Simon & Schuster Nancy Drew Mystery paperbacks, Bess is still very much a comic figure, obsessed with food, boys and shopping. George is interested in fitness, health and sports. Because there are limited opportunities for George’s interest in sports to be utilised in stories (most of the mysteries do not focus on or include sports, for example; most references to George’s interest in sports are just that – references, rather than a significant part of the plots), this aspect of her character is underdeveloped, while Bess’s interest in food comes up in just about every mystery, as the girls eat at regular intervals during mysteries. Much of George’s dialogue is merely in (oppositional) response to Bess.

The Simon & Schuster books emphasise the differences between George and Bess, succinctly contrasting their appearance and personalities when introducing them at the beginning of each mystery. In #130 *The Sign of the Falcon* (1996) Nancy

...never stopped marvelling at how different the two cousins were. Aside from their physical appearances – Bess was short, blond, and forever

¹⁵⁰ Chamberlain, K. “The Secrets of Nancy Drew”, p.3.

dieting, and George was tall, brunette, and athletic – their personalities were as different as night and day.¹⁵¹

In this mystery, the girls have gone to New York to search for Nancy's father, who appears to be missing. Upon arrival, Bess has all sorts of plans:

'We can go clothes shopping – I got the names of a bunch of cool new stores from my favourite magazine, *Bellissima*. Oh, and I want to try that new restaurant where all the waiters and waitresses are on roller skates. Plus, we have to take in a Broadway show, maybe a musical...' ¹⁵²

George, however, has other ideas: "'Maybe we could catch a Mets game, too... And there's a 10K race in Central Park on Sunday'", to which, Bess is incredulous: "'You want to exercise why you're here?' Bess said, aghast. 'Why?'" ¹⁵³

The opening description of the cousins in #160 *The Clue of the Crystal Dove* (2001) again emphasises their differences:

Bess and George were first cousins and devoted friends, but they were also total opposites. Blond-haired Bess loved clothes, high-calorie desserts, and boy-watching, while George's interests ran more to athletics. ¹⁵⁴

Bess's idea of sightseeing is "'checking out the cool shops and restaurants'", while George would prefer "'visiting the Museum of Natural History and hiking across

¹⁵¹ Keene, C. *The Sign of the Falcon*. New York: Minstrel, 1996, pp.3-4.

¹⁵² Keene, C. *The Sign of the Falcon*, p.3.

¹⁵³ Keene, C. *The Sign of the Falcon*, p.3.

¹⁵⁴ Keene, C. *The Clue of the Crystal Dove*. New York: Minstrel, 2001, p.3.

the Brooklyn Bridge” Bess response to George is, ““Sounds like torture. All the sights I’m interested in seeing can be found in Bloomingdale’s””.¹⁵⁵

In 1993, Simon & Schuster described George as “a young Pam Shriver type, good-looking, athletic and courteous.”¹⁵⁶ Obviously, George has become progressively more physically attractive, from her days of being the self-described homely girl with a pug-nose. In #121 *The Fortune-Teller’s Secret* (1995), the cousins are likened to another binary, night and day (and this comparison to night and day is used in later mysteries, such as *The Sign of the Falcon*, as quoted previously), in their introduction:

George and Bess were as different as night and day. George was passionate about sports, while Bess avoided physical activity as much as possible. They were opposites in appearance, too. Bess was petite, with long, straw blond hair, while tall, athletic George had brown eyes and short, curly dark hair.¹⁵⁷

Note that in the three opening descriptions just mentioned, there is no reference to George’s boyishness, tomboyishness, or her “boyish name”, as was typical in the 1960s and 70s post-revision texts. Although much of Bess and George’s characterisation and interaction follow the established pattern set in earlier books, the so-called gender binary (George/masculine, Bess/feminine) is unnamed and implicit.

¹⁵⁵ Keene, C. *The Clue of the Crystal Dove*, p.3.

¹⁵⁶ Plunkett-Powell, K. *The Nancy Drew Scrapbook*, p.93.

¹⁵⁷ Keene, C. *The Sign of the Falcon*, p.4.

The Fortune-Teller's Secret begins with the girls' arrival at a fair, the Harvest Festival. Bess is keen to start with the food stalls, suggesting the apple cider stand or the maple sugar ice cream stand.¹⁵⁸ Just like in *The Spider Sapphire Mystery*, Bess wears impractical shoes for a day of walking (this time, through a fairground, rather than the woods), and has to ask the others to make a rest stop. This, of course, prompts chiding from George, who compares Bess's "bright red ankle boots with high, pointy heels" with her own "thick-soled leather hiking boots".¹⁵⁹ Being an ardent shopper/consumer, Bess enjoys her day at the festival, buying all sorts of products and souvenirs. George still teases her cousin, although it is important to note that her teasing has a much lighter tone, and is not as cutting or mean-spirited as in the older books.

Bess held up a small stuffed cow. 'I dunked six apples in less than a minute!' she announced proudly. 'Aren't I amazing?'

George *grinned mischievously* at her. 'I think you were just hungry.'¹⁶⁰

In the older mysteries, there is rarely a grin or smile when George makes her snide comments to Bess. The Simon & Schuster George is a much gentler critic.

In #120 *The Case of the Floating Crime* (1994), the cousins are once again described as opposites, minus any mention of the boyishness of George: "Although the two girls were cousins, they were total opposites – George was dark-haired,

¹⁵⁸ Keene, C. *The Fortune-Teller's Secret*. New York: Minstrel, 1994, p.1.

¹⁵⁹ Keene, C. *The Fortune-Teller's Secret*, pp.3-4.

¹⁶⁰ Keene, C. *The Fortune-Teller's Secret*, p.13, my italics.

slim, and athletic, while Bess was blond and ever so slightly plump”.¹⁶¹ In this mystery, Bess is on a diet; her eating (or rather, lack of eating) features prominently in the narrative. Interestingly, with the focus on Bess’s dieting, George does not tease Bess about her weight or eating habits. At the beginning of the story, Bess turns down a slice of apple pie.¹⁶² She then shows George and Nancy just how serious she is about sticking to her diet, when they are at a party: “A couple of trays of appetizers – tiny wedges of pizza and sausages wrapped in flaky pastry – were laid out on an island counter. Bess leaned over the trays, staring hungrily with her hands behind her back”.¹⁶³ Bess’s firm resolve continues in Pizza Palace, where she turns down a slice of pizza. She refuses to follow George’s advice to order a salad: “‘I don’t want a salad,’ Bess said. ‘I’m going to lose this weight. And if I can’t have the pizza, I’d rather have nothing’”.¹⁶⁴ At a barbecue at the Drews’, Nancy notices Bess takes “only a teaspoonful of each of the salads”, and none of the grilled chicken.¹⁶⁵ The book then uses the father/adult figure of Mr. Drew to ‘lecture’ Bess (and its readers) on eating sensibly – here, we can see an example of Sutherland’s politics of advocacy at work: “‘Bess, if you want to lose a few pounds, you have to use your head,’ he said gently. ‘Everything on this table is healthy if you eat a moderate amount’”.¹⁶⁶ At the end of the book, both mystery and crash-dieting situation are resolved neatly. Bess has come to her senses and is no longer starving herself to lose weight. She tells Nancy, “‘I’ll have an order of pasta with

¹⁶¹ Keene, C. *The Case of the Floating Crime*. New York: Minstrel, 1994, pp.2-3. So not only is she slightly, she is even less slightly plump! *Ever so slightly!* Bess has become progressively less plump: from plump to slightly plump to ever so slightly plump.

¹⁶² Keene, C. *The Case of the Floating Crime*, p.4.

¹⁶³ Keene, C. *The Case of the Floating Crime*, p.8.

¹⁶⁴ Keene, C. *The Case of the Floating Crime*, p.33.

¹⁶⁵ Keene, C. *The Case of the Floating Crime*, p.75.

¹⁶⁶ Keene, C. *The Case of the Floating Crime*, p.75.

veggie sauce and a small salad with diet dressing. I'm giving up crash diets for good..."¹⁶⁷

Bess's dieting reaches a more serious level in #111 *The Secret at Solaire* (1993), in which the girls stay at a health spa in Arizona. This text features many examples of standard George and Bess behaviour. Bess, of course, expresses awe and appreciation for the ambience as soon as they arrive: "Wow! This place is incredibly gorgeous!"¹⁶⁸ She continues this role throughout the book, such as admiring wildflowers while on a hike.¹⁶⁹ Bess announces that she is at the spa because she needs to lose five pounds.¹⁷⁰ George cynically regards the guests who have arrived in a stretch limousine and a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce: "Lifestyles of the rich and obnoxious"¹⁷¹.

Meeting one of their hosts at the spa, George identifies herself as the "tennis type", and Bess labels herself as a "dieting type", eager for a complete beauty makeover. By way of introduction, Bess reveals that Nancy is a detective. In the space of this short burst of dialogue, it is revealed (and confirmed to those of us who have come to expect and recognise the formula) that George is the sporty one, Bess is into dieting and beauty, and is a blabbermouth too. George and Bess's immediate desires are typical: George wants to "to play tennis and swim and then

¹⁶⁷ Keene, C. *The Case of the Floating Crime*, p.151.

¹⁶⁸ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993, p.1.

¹⁶⁹ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.39.

¹⁷⁰ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.3. Bess's proverbial need/desire to lose "five pounds" is mentioned in a number of texts.

¹⁷¹ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.5.

play more tennis’’, while Bess, eyeing off the fruit basket, wants to eat some. She shakes her head ruefully and says, ‘‘I’m not even here an hour and already I’m starved’’.¹⁷²

When Bess is informed by the spa’s doctor that she needs to lose *six* pounds rather than five, the news has a profound effect on her. She throws herself into dieting and exercise with a heightened fervency, drinks the spa’s energy supplements, and orders steamed vegetables for dinner (George has ordered a more substantial meal of steak and rice). At the dinner table, while George and other guests are dismayed at the size of their meal portions, Bess accepts her dinner portion without complaint. As the book continues, Bess continues with her enthusiastic embracing of her new diet and exercise regime. After a number of mishaps that have occurred since their arrival, George is suspicious about Solaire, telling Nancy and Bess ‘‘...there’s definitely something weird going on at this place’’.¹⁷³ Nancy (and of course, the reader) agrees, while Bess has the steadfast trust of a cult member, insisting that ‘‘Solaire is one of the finest spas in the country. It’s been written up in all the health and beauty magazines’’.¹⁷⁴

Just as with *The Case of the Floating Crime*, *The Secret at Solaire* does not allow Bess’s obsession with losing weight to continue without sensible messages about dieting. The reader is shown that Bess’s obsession is clearly not a healthy one. For example, George shows concern about her cousin when she tells Nancy,

¹⁷² Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.10.

¹⁷³ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.28.

¹⁷⁴ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.28.

“‘We’re being fed less than the average American house cat, and Bess isn’t even eating that much... I’m really worried about her’”.¹⁷⁵ Bess is so engrossed in her workout on an exercise machine that she quite disturbingly fails to notice another guest’s accident on equipment nearby.¹⁷⁶ Both Nancy and George are troubled by Bess’s failure to respond to the accident; it is clear that Bess’s behaviour in this incident is abnormal and certainly not ideal. George tries to talk some sense into Bess, *gently*, we are told:

‘Bess, you’re losing it,’ George said. When her cousin didn’t reply, she added gently, ‘You know, you might want to take things slower and build up to all this exercise gradually. It’d be a lot easier on your body.’

Bess opened one eye. ‘I’m only going to be here a week. Besides, I’ve already lost exactly one point two pounds. I can’t stop now. You know what they say – no pain, no gain’.¹⁷⁷

George tells Bess (and the reader too, again, another example of the politics of advocacy),

‘I am so tired of everyone in sports saying ‘No pain, no gain,’ as if it were some law! The truth is, you can get stronger and more limber and into better shape without hurting yourself’.¹⁷⁸

The text conveys to the reader that although Bess is losing weight, she is not doing it the right way – both her friends try to tell her the *truth* about dieting and about her

¹⁷⁵ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.53.

¹⁷⁶ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.58.

¹⁷⁷ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, pp.59-60.

¹⁷⁸ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.60.

appearance, and Nancy observes, “there were dark shadows under her friend’s eyes. For someone who had just gotten up, Bess looked exhausted”.¹⁷⁹

George and Nancy try to tempt Bess with food that they plan to have on their trip to Old Tucson, reeling off a spread of food in the way Bess has been known to fantasise:

‘Hot dogs and hamburgers and french fries,’ George said dreamily.

‘Butterscotch sundaes and devil’s food cake,’ Nancy added. ‘And honey-dipped chicken.’

Bess stood up, looking extremely self-righteous. ‘I refuse to be tempted,’ she said in a lofty tone.¹⁸⁰

The use of the adjective “self-righteous” suggests a haughtiness and obstinacy which reflects negatively on Bess’s obsessive dieting. At the conclusion of the story, Bess tells Nancy she has lost three-and-a-half pounds, and that she is happy. It is not surprising that Bess has not lost the ‘required’ six pounds; by losing the three-and-a-half pounds the moderate dieting and sensible weight loss message is preserved, but significantly, the hierarchy is left the same; Bess is still the one who is a little overweight. The story ends with Bess back to ‘normal’, asking Nancy if she has any emergency chocolate bars left.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.85.

¹⁸⁰ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.100.

¹⁸¹ Keene, C. *The Secret at Solaire*, p.152.

In the Grosset and Dunlap books, people tend to seek Nancy's help to solve mysteries. In the Simon & Schuster books, George and Bess are used as convenient vehicles for interesting situations, themes and storylines that provide settings or situations for the mysteries. In #117 *The Mystery on the Menu* (1993), for example, George is a winner of a competition run by the Wolfe Culinary Institute in New York. Her winning entry is a recipe for Raspberry Chiffon Cake, George-style: "It's based on something my grandmother used to make, except I've adapted it for health-conscious people. It's low calorie and low fat".¹⁸² Once the three girls have all decided to go to New York to attend cooking classes, an opportunity for a typical Bess moment arises: already thinking about her wardrobe for the trip, she tells Nancy and George, "Excuse me, guys, but I have some major shopping to do... I'll need a chef's hat, an apron, and maybe some very baggy sweaters, just in case I gain a pound or two".¹⁸³

This Mystery Story contains many examples of silly Bess. She has a hard time in this mystery: she's criticised by the instructor for her slowness in cutting up fruit in class, but it turns out her meagre showing of cut fruit is because she ate most of it,¹⁸⁴ and she loses control of her electric beater and later has to comb out clumps of whipped cream and frosting from her hair.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Keene, C. *Mystery on the Menu*. New York: Minstrel, 1993, p.3.

¹⁸³ Keene, C. *Mystery on the Menu*, p.4.

¹⁸⁴ Keene, C. *Mystery on the Menu*, p.17.

¹⁸⁵ Keene, C. *Mystery on the Menu*, pp.85-86.

George, of course, is keen on physical activity and does not waste an opportunity to go skiing, to work off the rich food they have been consuming.¹⁸⁶ She organises a group to go skiing, and gives Bess an early morning wake-up call. Bess scolds George for waking her up “so that I could climb some icy, hilly trails with a couple of sticks and poles”, but in typical Bess fashion has a change of heart once she finds out that one of the good-looking young men is going skiing too.¹⁸⁷ The group hierarchy remains intact in the cooking classes in *Mystery on the Menu* – George performs proficiently; Bess is the bumbling, incompetent glutton; Nancy is, of course, naturally skilled and outshines them both.

Of course, there has been little indication previously of any interest George might have had in cooking, before *Mystery on the Menu*. But no doubt the regular reader of the series has been trained to expect the cousins to take up new hobbies or roles which lead to interesting themes and mysteries. In #116 *The Case of the Twin Teddy Bears*, Bess has a job in a specialty teddy bear shop, where a robbery occurs. In #127 *The Case of the Dangerous Solution*, George has a job making deliveries for a pharmacy that becomes embroiled in a poisoning scandal. In #144 *The Email Mystery*, someone has hacked into the emails of Mr. Drew, and it is Bess, with her new interest in internet chat groups (she belongs to a group that discusses romance novelists) who introduces Nancy to the world of Internet cafes and bulletin boards.

¹⁸⁶ Keene, C. *Mystery on the Menu*, p.86.

¹⁸⁷ Keene, C. *Mystery on the Menu*, p.94.

The Facsimile Editions by Applewood Books, 1991-current

In 1991, the first of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories facsimile editions were published by Applewood Books.¹⁸⁸ As the name suggests, these editions are produced as facsimiles of the original books, retaining the original text, typography, cover and internal illustrations.¹⁸⁹ They are published in hardback, with illustrated dust jackets, appearing very much like the original books. The intended audience for these editions are nostalgic adults, rather than children, as Phil Zuckerman, head of Applewood Books explained at a sales conference:

I showed them the original texts and I showed them the rewritten texts, and they looked at me and said, ‘We can’t sell this. You’re asking people to pay \$12.95 for something they can buy for \$4.50?’ And I said, ‘No, they’re different books; they’re for different audiences. This is for a nostalgic audience, people who want to return to their earlier days.’¹⁹⁰

The facsimile editions, published as hardback books with dust jackets are more expensive at both production and retail levels, compared to mass-marketed paperbacks. The reader makes more of an investment in the purchase of the facsimile editions. As well as being more expensive, they are less disposable, more solid and permanent in their concrete form. Zuckerman terms these books “children’s books for adults.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ At the time of writing, Applewood has published nineteen facsimile edition stories, the most recent being #19 *The Quest of the Missing Map*.

¹⁸⁹ The facsimile editions however provide the internal illustrations at the front of the book (as frontispieces), rather than located within the body of the text as per the originals.

¹⁹⁰ Zuckerman, P. “Publishing the Applewood Reprints”, p.43.

¹⁹¹ Johnson, Deirdre, Zuckerman, Phil and Bierbaum, Esther Green. “The History of the Stratemeyer Books: Questions and Answers” in *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, p.49. The Harry Potter series has taken advantage of the concept of “children’s books for adults”; the ‘adult’ versions have

Of course, today's children are free to read these texts, just as their mothers and grandmothers may. As these editions retain the original text, they present the original tomboy with her unbrushed hair, in her proud, blunt and brawny glory. While such a masculine girl would be unacceptable and disturbing in a contemporary Nancy Drew title (in which no such girl with this degree of blatant tomboyishness exists), I suggest that she is tolerated in the facsimile editions because of two reasons. Firstly, the books are marketed at adults rather than children. Adults are not seen as having innocence that must be preserved, and even more importantly, adults are not thought to be impressionable sponges that must be protected. Secondly, the texts are presented and marketed to be read with the knowledge that they are reproductions of past texts, that is, texts located in a specific social and historical context. The historical positioning of the texts goes beyond the language of the narratives and the old-fashioned illustrations. The cover illustrations have a graphic in the shape of a gold seal imposed on the top, which announces "The Originals Just As You Remember Them" and in the earlier facsimile editions smaller print tells the reader that there is an Introduction to be read.¹⁹² The blurb on the back of the books proclaims "She's Back Again... Just As You Remember Her"¹⁹³ The Publisher's Note for the facsimile edition of *The*

photographic covers, rather than the cartoonish artwork featured on the 'children's' versions. Both versions contain exactly the same text.

¹⁹² The facsimile edition of *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, for example, has an introduction by Mildred Wirt Benson. Other volumes have had introductions by other female authors who read Nancy Drew books as girls. The introductions are mostly sentimental reflections by these writers, on their experiences reading Nancy Drew, and the changes to the series over the years, and of their own girlhoods.

¹⁹³ Quoted from the facsimile edition of *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*: "The original editions are back – the way they were first written. Beginning in 1959, the Nancy Drew series were updated, rewritten, and condensed, and these old editions went out of print... Everything has changed since you first read these prized classics. But now Nancy (and Frank and Joe Hardy and Tom Swift and

Secret at Shadow Ranch tells us, in a tone of disclaimer, “Much has changed in America since the Nancy Drew series first began in 1930... the modern reader may be extremely uncomfortable with the racial and social stereotyping, the roles women play in these books... These books are part of our heritage. They are a window on our real past”.¹⁹⁴ The Publisher’s Note and the Introduction by Mildred Wirt Benson are the only new additions to the text; these additions serve to highlight the book’s status as a *reproduction and product of the past*.

The tomboy is a historical figure in these ‘period’ books. The facsimile editions are significant not only for the nostalgic fan or collector who wants to read the original out-of-print texts, but they are also important as historical artefacts for studies such as this, in providing evidence of past representations of girlhood. They are also, of course, entertaining stories.

With the conclusion of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories in 2003, a new era for Nancy, George and Bess began, with the publication of the Nancy Drew Girl Detective series. As I will discuss in the next section, the sleuthing group dynamic is still present, but all three characters have changed significantly to suit a new contemporary audience.

Judy Bolton) are back just as they were. With all the chums and roadsters. Why, Nancy’s hair is even a golden bob again! Rediscover the simple sense of time, rich language, and enlightening perspective on America’s past that make these classic editions even more absorbing than when they were first published”.

¹⁹⁴ Publisher’s Note from the facsimile edition of *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, n.p..

Nancy Drew Girl Detective, 2004-current

Although the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories came to an end with #175 in 2003, Simon & Schuster began publishing a new series in 2004, called Nancy Drew Girl Detective.¹⁹⁵ And yes, the ‘author’ is *still* Caroline Keene!

There are two major textual differences between Girl Detective and the Mystery Stories. Firstly, the stories are told from a first person perspective: the narrator is Nancy Drew herself. The language of the narrator is of a girl in her late teens, and is more conversational, colloquial and contemporary in tone than the formal, anonymous implied-adult narrator of the original and revised Grosset and Dunlap Mystery Stories. Nancy tells the reader what she thinks of her friends, for example, admiring the skills they have that she doesn’t. This is related to the second significant difference: the group dynamic is completely different, and three girls have different interests and skills. Although the series still bears her name in its title, the new Nancy is no longer the perfect sleuth who leads two loyal but clearly inferior sidekicks. Nancy Drew, Girl Detective is absent-minded and sometimes leaves her house less than immaculately presented.¹⁹⁶

The new Nancy respects Bess’s expertise in fashion matters. In #1 *Without a Trace*, Nancy tells us,

¹⁹⁵ At the time of writing, ten titles have been published, with a total of fifteen titles named and scheduled for publication.

¹⁹⁶ The old Nancy Drew was always immaculately presented; only her car being forced off the road by criminals or an unscheduled rescue of a child from drowning would mar her appearance.

Bess is always trying to convince both George and me to take more interest in clothes and makeup – two subjects that interest her a lot and us not much at all. I like an occasional shopping spree as much as the next girl, and I enjoy wearing nice things on special occasions, but most of the time I just can't be bothered thinking too much about stuff like that.¹⁹⁷

Nancy even accepts Bess's advice on how to dress; Bess tells her, with the confidence of an expert, "...if you're going out with Ned, you should wear that lavender blouse you never wear. It really brings out the color of your eyes. And don't forget to put on lipstick! I keep telling you, it really makes a difference".¹⁹⁸ In the Mystery Stories, Bess's interest in her appearance was portrayed as vanity and silliness, and she was constantly ridiculed by George for it; in the new series, her interest and knowledge of fashion and cosmetics are portrayed in a much more positive light.

The new Bess and George bring valuable skills to the sleuthing group. Bess is a mechanical whiz, which means she can fix cars and pick locks. In #3 *False Notes*, Bess's handy lock picking helps Nancy escape from a tricky situation. George is an expert in computing and electronics, and can hack into computer networks with ease. As Nancy informs us, "Bess loves cars like George loves computers. She fixed up her own car herself, and can diagnose a damaged gasket or a blown engine from a mile away".¹⁹⁹ Bess is no longer the stereotypical helpless

¹⁹⁷ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*. New York: Aladdin, 2004, pp.33-34.

¹⁹⁸ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.33.

¹⁹⁹ Keene, C. *False Notes*. New York: Aladdin, 2004, p.107.

damsel, as Nancy narrates, “[m]ost people are surprised to find out how handy Bess is. She looks like the sort of girl who would have trouble changing a lightbulb, but in fact she has an almost freakish natural ability to fix things, from a sticky toaster to a stalled car”.²⁰⁰ According to Nancy, George “loves talking about computers with anyone who shares her passion for them, especially since Bess and I aren’t interested in them much beyond checking our e-mail or doing a little occasional research”.²⁰¹ This is completely different to the Mystery Stories, where George and Bess brought no useful skills or expertise to the sleuthing group. George knew judo, which was inconsistently and under-utilised. The old George and Bess were constantly in awe of Nancy’s superiority. Now they have their own areas of superiority.

The drastic reinvention of characters and the group dynamic may disturb seasoned Nancy Drew fans, but it is important to remember that the Girl Detective series is also aimed at a new audience – a generation of readers who may not have read the Mystery Stories and therefore do not have the same sentimental loyalties, as opposed to the Applewood facsimile editions, discussed previously. This is the beginning of a new series, and to those brand new readers there is no reinvention. For readers familiar with bumbling, squeamish, glutton Bess, it would probably be inconceivable to have Bess transformed into a mechanical whiz, but a new reader would probably find it believable to have teenaged female characters skilled at fixing cars and computer-hacking. The ‘old’ stereotypes of tomboy and feminine

²⁰⁰ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.26.

²⁰¹ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.32.

girl would be far more inconceivable and negatively received, compared to proactive girls with skills and talents.

The cousins are still presented as a pair of opposites in this series. In #1 *Without a Trace*, Nancy the narrator introduces the cousins, telling the reader how different they are, and what she thinks of them:

Even though they're cousins, it never ceases to amaze me how different Bess Marvin and George Fayne are from each other. If you looked up the word *girl* in the dictionary, you'd find Bess's picture there to illustrate it. She's pretty, blond, and curvy in all the right places, with dimples in both cheeks and a wardrobe full of flowery dresses and lots of delicate jewelry that sets off her perfect features. But angular, athletic-looking George prefers jeans to jewelry. She keeps her dark hair cut short and is quick to correct anyone who calls her by her given name, Georgia.²⁰²

In the original *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, George explained the origin of her name: “‘It’s not even short for Georgia. Everyone had given up hope for a boy in our family by the time I came, so I was named George, just plain George, for my grandfather’”.²⁰³ The origins of George’s name were rewritten in later Mystery Stories, such as *Mystery on the Menu*, where George clearly states that George is short for Georgia. In the Girl Detective series, George’s name and family are given a complete overhaul. In #3 *False Notes*, we are told, “George lives with her parents, her older brother, Sebastian, when he’s home from college, and her younger

²⁰² Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.7.

²⁰³ Keene, C. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (OT), p.26.

brother, Scott”.²⁰⁴ As the original George of *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* revealed, she was named for her grandfather because there were no sons. The new George has a younger and an older brother, rendering that old family story obsolete; her older brother would have been the George of the family. In #3 *False Notes*, George’s mother calls her “Georgia”, and Nancy the narrator observes “George wrinkled her nose at her hated full name”.²⁰⁵

The new Bess is “curvy”; her opposite, George is “angular”. Nancy suggests that Bess is the definition or illustration of “girl”, but does not talk about George’s boyishness. Any boyishness is implied by George’s interests and so-called angularity. Interestingly, in this new series it is George, rather than Bess who talks about food. In *Without a Trace*, when Nancy and George visit Nancy’s new neighbor, George helps herself liberally to cookies:

‘Now *this* is what I call investigating,’ George whispered to me as she leaned forward to help herself to several cookies. No matter how many sweets George eats, her slim frame never gains an ounce – a fact that is a constant source of irritation to her curvy cousin.²⁰⁶

The majority of food references, specifically expressions of enthusiasm for and enjoyment of food are all from George. She comments on Simone’s “great”

²⁰⁴ Keene, C. *False Notes*, p.22.

²⁰⁵ Keene, C. *False Notes*, p.74.

²⁰⁶ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.9.

barbecue,²⁰⁷ helps herself to a slice of grilled mushroom²⁰⁸ and licks her fingers as she eats.²⁰⁹

The new George is very much like the old glutton Bess, except, of course, she does not struggle with her weight as Bess did. In *False Notes*, when Nancy arrives late meeting George and Bess for lunch, George complains: “‘We’ve been there for ten minutes, ‘she said grumpily, ‘and we’re starving. If you hadn’t shown up soon, I was going to order without you’”²¹⁰ This is reminiscent of Bess’s impatience in the original text of #9 *The Sign of the Twisted Candles*:

‘There you are at last,’ Bess cried. ‘I’ve almost died sitting here being polite, while all the time this was teasing me with its perfume.’

“This” proved to be a plateful of golden cinnamon toast from which Bess lifted the lid.²¹¹

There will not be any eating disorder or crash-dieting type storylines with George in this series, as Nancy tells us “No matter how many sweets George eats, her slim frame never gains an ounce...”²¹² The new George delights in fantasizing about food (just like the old Bess), while new Bess shows remarkable self-discipline and consideration for her figure:

²⁰⁷ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.140..

²⁰⁸ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.141.

²⁰⁹ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.142.

²¹⁰ Keene, C. *False Notes*, pp.84.

²¹¹ Keene, C. *The Sign of the Twisted Candles*, Facsimile ed. Original text version. Bedford, MA: Applewood, 1993, p.19.

²¹² Keene, C. *False Notes*, p.171.

‘Go ahead and think,’ George said, her gaze wandering to the large menu board above the counter. ‘Meanwhile, I’ll think about ordering a liverwurst and salami with extra cheese.’

‘Liverwurst?’ Bess protested. ‘Ick! Besides, I thought you said you were in the mood for a burger?’

‘Oh, yeah!’ George’s eyes lit up. She glanced from one side of the menu board to the other, looking conflicted. ‘They both sound great. Then again, so does the double bratwurst special.’

Bess licked her lips. ‘Ooh, that does sound good. But I’m trying to stay away from the heavy stuff.’ She patted her belly. ‘I think I’ll have the turkey on rye...’²¹³

The new George is also a fount of trivia and information. This is a new twist on the way educational or thematic material is conveyed to the reader. In the old Mystery Stories information was most often provided by the girls asking questions of an expert, whether on crocodiles in *Mystery of Crocodile Island* or seashells, in *The Invisible Intruder*. Bess and George rarely had information to provide; they were more likely to ask questions that allowed experts to provide the information. The first Girl Detective mystery is set in Nancy’s neighborhood, so while there is no visit to an exotic location, George impresses Nancy with her knowledge, and provides the reader with trivia, regarding zucchini:

‘That’s the American name for the vegetable you probably know as a *courgette*,’ George explained.

²¹³ Keene, C. *False Notes*, pp.84-85.

I shot her a surprised glance. Did George remember that random word from French class? But she's always coming up with odd trivia like this that she finds on the Internet – so maybe that's how she knew the word. Sometimes her quirky memory comes in very handy.²¹⁴

The new Bess is still boy-crazy. We are told that George and Nancy are “used to seeing men go instantly gaga over our friend”.²¹⁵ At Nancy's new neighbour Simone's party, Nancy is no longer the superior beauty as she once was in the original *The Clue in the Diary* (“Nancy had always been popular and on this particular night she did not lack dancing partners”); it is Bess who attracts the most attention. Nancy reports,

As soon as they noticed our arrival, all four guys – even Jacques – hurried over to say hello. Simone introduced Ned, and the guys greeted him politely, though all of them seemed much more interested in greeting Bess. I had to admit, she looked particularly stunning that night. She was wearing a pale blue dress that flattered her nice figure and peaches-and-cream skin coloring. Soon she was the center of a throng of admirers.²¹⁶

As she tries to quiz a suspect without him realizing, Nancy actually tries to imitate Bess's way with the opposite sex: “I tried to put a little of Bess's teasing, flirtatious tone into the words. It always seemed to work for her, and Jacques seemed so distracted that anything was worth a try”.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.17.

²¹⁵ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.20.

²¹⁶ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.73.

²¹⁷ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.84.

The old banter between the cousins is still present in the new series. In *Without a Trace*, when the cousins go to visit Nancy in hospital, the following exchange takes place:

‘Sorry we’re late,’ George said. ‘And Bess might be a few more minutes. She found a cute young medical resident to flirt with out there.’

Bess hurried in and gave her cousin a shove. ‘I wasn’t flirting,’ she insisted, her cheeks flushed so deeply they almost matched the hot-pink jacket she was wearing. ‘I was just being polite. What did you want me to do, ignore him when he said hello?’

George rolled her eyes.²¹⁸

Bess is still more vain than practical, as Nancy observes, of Bess’s chosen outfit for a surveillance mission:

I cast a curious glance at Bess’s outfit. In addition to the hot-pink cotton jacket, she was wearing a matching pink-and-white-striped T-shirt, white capri pants, and cute pink sandals. It wasn’t exactly an inconspicuous outfit, especially on someone who was already as eye catching as Bess.

George was dressed much more discreetly, in jeans and a dark T-shirt.²¹⁹

Not surprisingly, the subject of their surveillance catches George and Bess following him, and when the cousins report back to Nancy, it is an opportunity for comedy:

²¹⁸ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.100.

²¹⁹ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.102.

Bess looked sheepish. 'Well, I guess we weren't being quite as sneaky as we thought,' she began.

'What's this "we" stuff?' George broke in with a snort. 'I'm not the one who decided to dress up like a neon sign! You could see that pink jacket from outer space'.²²⁰

The new group dynamic of the Nancy Drew Girl Detective series presents the three girls with contrasting personalities, interests and aptitudes. George and Bess have been brought up to date and now have their own strengths and areas of expertise to contribute. They are still portrayed as opposites; however the masculine as represented by George is much more implicit than explicit, as it was in the original and even the revised Mystery Stories. The sporting George has been replaced by a George who is interested in electronics and computing, which is more directly useful in the mysteries. The feminine is still exaggerated and represented by interest in appearance and the opposite sex. It will be interesting to see if boyfriends are introduced for George and Bess at a later date in the new series, and if they are still named Burt and Dave.

The tomboy construct of George Fayne was initially an overtly boyish, unfeminine character, providing a sharp and constant contrast to her cousin, the ultra-feminine Bess Marvin. Early books emphasised her bluntness, boyish and unattractive appearance, as well as her scornfulness of femininity. George's tomboyishness and Bess's femininity were their distinguishing features in the

²²⁰ Keene, C. *Without a Trace*, p.102.

sleuthing group dynamic and as such, the narratives presented these attributes as *constants*. The texts revolved around mysteries and not stories of development – there was no need for the tomboy to grow out of her tomboyishness in this series. Over the course of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories’ seventy-three-year life span, however, George’s overt tomboyishness was gradually diminished. George and Bess continued to be contrasted with one another, but George ceased to be as blatantly boyish as she once was, while Bess became less plump. While Bess’s gluttony evolved into a preoccupation with dieting and weight loss, which was presented in the narrative with responsible messages about the sensibility of eating in moderation and the dangers of crash dieting, George’s contrast to Bess was portrayed in the form of sportiness – a safe substitute for overt boyishness/masculinity.

The transformation of the tomboy and her feminine cousin reflects shifts in what was considered ideologically acceptable for presentation to children during the long life span of the series. The once benign tomboy construct was toned down to avoid the so-called irresponsible portrayal of a girl who actively performed masculinity, suggestive of a lesbian; the once plump Bess was slimmed down to avoid accusations of insensitivity and political incorrectness towards overweight people, and subsequently used as a means for the education of readers in eating moderately. With the new Girl Detective series, George and Bess have evolved again and possess very different attributes and talents, while still presented in direct contrast with one another as part of the sleuthing group dynamic.

In the following chapter, I will examine the Trixie Belden Mystery series, focusing on the publishing context of the series and specific editorial decisions which directly affected the representation of the tomboy character. I will carry out detailed analysis of the character of Trixie and discuss her portrayal in terms of *the gaze* and the heteronormative system of gendered behaviour and appearance that she overwhelmingly desires to fit into, the gender that she is depicted as constantly in the process of becoming.

Chapter Four

The Clue of the Ghost-Written Tomboy Part II: Trixie Belden

The Trixie Belden Mystery series, named after its tomboy heroine, was published by Whitman and later on by Golden Press, both subsidiaries of Western Publishing. Capitalising on the thriving demand for cheap, mass-marketed children's series fiction, Western/Whitman published a number of girls' mystery series including Ginny Gordon, Robin Kane and Meg Duncan,¹ but Trixie Belden was by far the most successful, spanning thirty-nine titles beginning with *The Secret of the Mansion* in 1948 and ending with *The Mystery of the Galloping Ghost* in 1986. In 2001, Random House acquired Golden Press, which included the rights to the Trixie Belden series. In 2003 the first four Trixie Belden books were reissued, and at the time of writing, Random House has reissued titles up to volume #13 *The Mystery on Cobbett's Island*. I will discuss the reissue of the series briefly, at the end of this chapter.

There are two main sections in this chapter. The first will focus on Trixie Belden in the context of the series' publishing background. I will present a brief overview of the origins of the series, the motivation of its creator and key editorial decisions made by its publisher. The series began as 'books in series', but then

¹ The Ginny Gordon series (five titles, 1948–1956) was written by Julie Campbell. See Melanie Kay Knight's *Schoolgirl Shamuses, Incorporated*, Rheem Valley, CA: SynSine, 1998, p.62 for a list of titles and synopses. Robin Kane (six titles, 1966–1971) and Meg Duncan (six titles, 1967–1972) were ghost-written and published under the pseudonyms of Eileen Hill and Holly Beth Walker respectively. See Knight, pp.63-64.

became, through the deliberate choice of the publisher, ‘series books’. The reasons for this change, which had a significant effect on the series and on the portrayal of its tomboy, were based on economics, issues of practicality and the editors’ “Fear of Sex”.² In addition to the mystery plots, earlier books in the series focus on Trixie’s tomboyishness and her struggles with femininity. She reflects upon her identity, her emotions and her interactions with others. The early books also hint strongly at a developing romantic relationship with Jim, Trixie’s best friend’s brother. The later books, which are considerably shorter, focus more on plot and less on Trixie’s personal development. One notable exception here which I will discuss in the second part of the chapter is #34 *The Mystery of the Missing Millionaire* (1980), which highlights Trixie’s personal battle with perspiration during a heat wave.

Like the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, the Trixie Belden series was revised. However, the revisions were in no way as drastic or dramatic as the Nancy Drew revisions. Some of the revised Nancy Drew texts were completely rewritten, resulting in stories that bore little or no resemblance to the originals. The Trixie Belden revisions consisted mainly of minor wording changes and updates to anachronistic references, none of which had a significant effect on the stories themselves. A number of changes were made with regards to the portrayal of characters which may have been perceived as insensitive or prejudicial.³ The

² As per Karen Sternheimer’s chapter “Fear of Sex” in *It's Not the Media: The Truth About Pop Culture's Influence on Children*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003. I have previously discussed Sternheimer’s argument regarding “Fear of Sex” in thesis Introduction.

³ For example, changes were made to the portrayal of two overweight minor characters, Mrs. Smith, in #2 *The Red Trailer Mystery* (1948) and Mrs. Sherman, in #6 *The Mystery in Arizona* (1958). See Knight, M.K. pp.313-315 and 318 (Mrs. Smith) and Knight, pp.332-333 (Mrs. Sherman). Presumably, such changes were made in the name of political correctness (or what I call *ideological*

revisions of interest to me in this chapter however, are small but significant changes related to the portrayal of the tomboy in two of the texts, namely #7 *The Mysterious Code* (1961) and #9 *The Happy Valley Mystery* (1962), which I will examine in detail.

In the second part of the chapter, I will focus on Trixie Belden the character via textual analysis. I will demonstrate that although the character of Trixie Belden exhibits attitudes that could be called feminist and questions femininity, the representation of gender in the series is strongly patriarchal, essential and heteronormative; in other words, the Trixie Belden series appears, through its tomboy, to question and resist the performance of femininity but ultimately *does not*. Although she is most happy and comfortable in jeans and sneakers and expresses a dislike of getting ‘dressed up’, Trixie still possesses an overriding desire to fit in and gain the approval of others. I will discuss the ways in which heteronormative gendered behaviour is reinforced through the figure of Trixie Belden (and her best friends, Honey and Di) in terms of *the gaze*, that is, “a mode of viewing reflecting a gendered code of desire”.⁴ In this case, the gaze is *a mode of*

acceptability in children’s literature). It was not only the overweight who were portrayed in a questionable way in the original texts; in #1 *The Secret of the Mansion*, the statement “He’s stubborn, just like all redheaded people” was changed to “He’s redheaded and stubborn”, Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.308, presumably because the original version had a stronger prejudicial tone.

⁴ Evans, Caroline and Lorraine Gamman, “The Gaze Revisited, Or Reviewing Queer Viewing” from Burston, Paul & Colin Richardson, eds. *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 1995, p.16, as cited in Chandler, Daniel, “Forms of Gaze” in *Notes on ‘the Gaze’*, 1998. Accessed 15 July 2005. Available from <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/gaze/gaze.html>.

viewing reflecting a gendered, heteronormative code of desire. Trixie is aware of being an object of gaze; as a coming of age figure she is learning (and the implication here is that the young readers/sponges, will learn too) the particular modes of ‘normal’, acceptable and/or desirable gender performance. Trixie also has the ability to gaze upon others – she turns her gaze on other girls, constantly comparing herself to other girls she knows and interacts with: her friends Honey and Di, her cousin Hallie Belden, and even female strangers she encounters. She gazes at other girls both *competitively* and *comparatively*, appraising and reflecting upon herself, upon her own physical appearance and gendered identity. She gazes at males, observing and admiring their physicality. It is through Trixie’s gaze as well as her being gazed at, that the heteronormative masculine/feminine binary and ‘appropriate’ gendered behaviour are reinforced in the Trixie Belden series. I will conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of the reissue of the Trixie Belden series by Random House. I will explore two main points: do the reissued Trixie Belden texts occupy a similar place in the market to the Nancy Drew facsimile editions? And how does Trixie Belden the tomboy compare with George Fayne the tomboy today?

Before I proceed further, I feel that the following point needs to be made: there has not been much by way of formal, academic scholarship done on the Trixie Belden series, and my sources for this chapter reflect this. It is my hope that my work on Trixie Belden for this thesis will fill some of the gap. I have relied primarily on my own knowledge, gained from years of reading (I should say *re-*

reading) the series, as a child, as an adult fan *and then* as a scholar of literature. Just as with other popular children's mystery and adventure series that have inspired collectors and adult fans, there is a wealth of information about Trixie Belden available on the World Wide Web, researched by fans, including *scholarly fans*. I have cited a number of such sources in this chapter. One particular text that I have used extensively in the preparation of this chapter is *Schoolgirl Shamuses, Incorporated* by Melanie Kay Knight (1998); Knight's research covers four of Whitman's girls' series, Ginny Gordon, Robin Kane, Meg Duncan and Trixie Belden, and the bulk of her analysis is concentrated on Trixie Belden.

Origins

The seed for the Trixie Belden series was sown at a meeting of New York literary agents held by Western Publishing in the late 1940s,⁵ with the objective to

...locate fast-moving, well-written mystery stories which could be produced and mass-marketed at prices kids could afford to pay themselves.

These books would not only be alternatives to comics, but to the higher-priced series books currently on the market.⁶

One of the literary agents who attended the meeting, Julie Campbell, was also a freelance writer.⁷ She was recruited to create two girls series to be published by

⁵ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.2.

⁶ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.2.

⁷ Julie Campbell is also known by her married name, Julie Campbell Tatham. However, in this chapter I will refer to her only as Julie Campbell as that was the name she used as Trixie Belden's author. Campbell is also known for writing books in the popular girls' series, Vicki Barr and Cherry Ames. She wrote for those two series both as a ghost-writer under the name of Helen Wells and also under her own name, see Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.100.

Whitman. The two series created by Campbell were Ginny Gordon and Trixie Belden.

Campbell wrote the first six Trixie Belden books, which were published in her name. When she decided to move on to other interests, Whitman negotiated an arrangement with Campbell which allowed them to continue the series using the settings and characters she had created, using ghost-writers to write the books. The ghost-written titles 7-39 were published under a pseudonym, Kathryn Kenny.⁸ Whitman used production techniques similar to those of the Stratemeyer Syndicate. Ghost-writers were paid a flat-fee per book, with no ongoing royalties. They would not be publicly acknowledged as authors of the books. They wrote the books based on short outlines supplied by Whitman. In Julie Campbell's words:

I wanted Trixie to be different from Nancy Drew. I thought Nancy Drew books were poorly written and totally implausible. The first rule should be that the kids get themselves into the scrapes and get themselves out without the assistance of adults. It's not a good book if you change that concept. They have to be well plotted and well written. I felt very strongly that they should be plausible—things that could happen to any kid at any time.⁹

⁸ This chapter will not add to the speculative studies regarding the authorship of the ghost-written titles. According to James D. and Kimberlee Keeline in "Trixie Belden Schoolgirl Shamuses", 1998, accessed 1 August 2005 at http://www.keeline.com/Trixie_Belden.pdf, "information on 'Kathryn Kenny' has been rather sketchy... Unfortunately, the editors and writers have rather dim memories of these details and Western Publishing has not been forthcoming with this kind of information". In their paper, the Keelines analyse the ghost-written books' themes and writing styles to identify the authors of the books. Similarly, In *Schoolgirl Shamuses, Incorporated*, Melanie Kay Knight examines thematic and stylistic patterns and contradictions in the books to form hypotheses of their authorship in Chapter IV "The Authorship Question", pp.177-214. She provides biographical information on the ghost-writers of Trixie Belden in Chapter III "Biographies: Author", pp.79-176.

⁹ From "Interview with Julie Campbell Tatham" by Ernie Kelly, accessed 8th November 2004, at <http://www.trixie-belden.com/books/jctinterview.htm>. This interview also appeared in *The Yellowback Library*, January 1988.

Trixie Belden is indeed very different to Nancy Drew.¹⁰ As well as being several years younger than Nancy Drew, Trixie is sometimes uncertain about her appearance and her identity; Nancy and tomboy George Fayne, being aged sixteen (eighteen after revision), exhibit none of Trixie's adolescent awkwardness. The books by Julie Campbell and a number of the ghost-written titles focus a significant part of the narrative on moments of Trixie's self-reflection, on her emotions and interactions with others. The Nancy Drew books simply do not do this. The Trixie Belden books feature not only mysteries and educational themes,¹¹ but also Trixie's struggles with growing up, juggling schoolwork and her assigned household chores, which she detests. Trixie is from a working-class family; her father works in a bank and her mother is a homemaker. Nancy is an only child with two regular female friends and a boyfriend; Trixie has two older brothers, one younger brother, a regular group of male and female friends, and no boyfriend (this issue is discussed in detail in this chapter).¹² Unlike Nancy, who has her driver's licence and a car at her disposal, Trixie relies on cycling, walking or getting lifts to get around. While Nancy is (un)naturally brilliant at everything she does, from trick horse riding to deciphering codes, Trixie is an ordinary teenager with none of Nancy's lofty intellectual talents; in #6 *The Mystery in Arizona* (1958) for example, Trixie is close

¹⁰ Refer to "Schoolgirl Shamuses as Syndicate Antithesis" by Kate Emburg, in Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, pp.66-69 for an analysis of the differences between the Nancy Drew (Stratemeyer Syndicate) and Trixie Belden (Whitman) series.

¹¹ Just like the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, Trixie Belden also featured interesting educational themes. For example, in *The Mystery in Arizona* (1958): the history of Arizona and Mexican customs; *The Mystery of the Phantom Grasshopper* (1977): numismatics (coin-collecting); *The Mystery at Saratoga* (1979): professional horse racing. A number of books featured first aid treatments in different situations: *The Secret of the Mansion* (1948): a snake bite; *The Mystery of Cobbett's Island* (1964): a fractured leg; *The Mystery at Mead's Mountain* (1978): a head wound.

¹² At this point, I am making comparisons between Trixie and Nancy Drew rather than Trixie and George Fayne, as Trixie and Nancy are both the central characters of their series.

to failing Mathematics and English, and agrees to be tutored in those subjects by Jim and her older brother Brian while on vacation. Like many girls of her age and younger who were the target audience of the series, Trixie wishes for a horse of her own, which of course her family would not be able to afford to buy or keep (again, just like much of her intended audience, the very market for the *affordable* series fiction produced by Whitman).

Trixie Belden lives in a town called Sleepyside-on-the-Hudson (affectionately shortened to Sleepyside by its residents), in New York State. She solves mysteries with the help of her best friend and feminine foil Honey Wheeler. Both girls have the ambition of opening the Belden-Wheeler Detective Agency someday. Trixie takes her sleuthing very seriously, amusing and often frustrating her family and friends with her doggedness and tendency towards suspicion. Trixie and Honey belong to a club called the Bob-Whites of the Glen (shortened to Bob-Whites or simply BWG), and the other club members, their friends Diana (Di) Lynch and Dan Mangan, Trixie's older brothers Brian and Mart, and Honey's adopted brother Jim Frayne also get involved in the mysteries. The eldest Bob-Whites, Brian and Jim obtain their driver's licences early in the series, which then allows them to drive Trixie and the younger Bob-Whites around.

Campbell's books establish the setting and Trixie's relationships with her family and friends. Her six books set up a temporal progression in the series, which was initially followed by the ghost-writers after her departure. The first sixteen

books can be read in sequential, chronological order.¹³ #1 *The Secret of the Mansion* (1948) takes place in July, ending with somewhat of a cliff hanger, with Jim the orphan running away, unaware of his inheritance and the disappearance of his cruel stepfather. #2 *The Red Trailer Mystery* (1950) follows on directly from this, with Trixie and Honey searching for Jim. At the conclusion of this story, Jim is adopted by the Wheelers and becomes Honey's brother. Trixie and Jim's special friendship is evident at this early stage. The third book *The Gatehouse Mystery* (1951) is set in summer, in August. In #4 *The Mysterious Visitor* (1954), the mystery revolves around a Halloween party and an impostor claiming to be Trixie's friend Diana's long-lost uncle Monty; #5 *The Mystery off Old Glen Road* (1956) is set in November, around Thanksgiving, and #6 *The Mystery in Arizona* (1958) sees Trixie and the Bob-Whites spending their Christmas vacation at the real Uncle Monty's ranch. In #7 *The Mysterious Code* (1961), Trixie attends a Valentine's party with Jim. Trixie is thirteen at the beginning of the series, and with the passing of time celebrates her fourteenth birthday at the end of #10 *The Marshland Mystery* (1962), in May.

Revisions and Age-Freezing

According to Knight,

¹³ The only exception to this is #13 *The Mystery on Cobbett's Island* (1964). According to Knight, p.76: "*The Mystery on Cobbett's Island* should actually be placed between volume 10 in which Trixie is still in school, and volume 11, in which she is on summer vacation, because in volume 13, we are told she has just graduated from junior high school. This seems to be more a case of publishing a title out of order than a deliberate decision to forgo the time-line at this point, because there are no references to volumes 11 or 12 in volumes 13 and 14".

It wasn't until later, when the series was reissued and new titles written (17-19) that the publishing company decided to forego the chronology. A company editor stated:

‘The Trixie mysteries are numbered in the order in which they were published. The authors were given freedom to choose the seasons and settings for their books. We feel this variety enriches the series.’

This is basically a cop-out and untrue. The ‘real’ quality that the time-line gave the series is what ‘enriched’ it. Maintaining a chronology would not have any effect on the setting, and since there already other ‘rules’ to follow, dictating which season an author wrote in would not have been unreasonable or made a tremendous difference. If an author wanted to write an out of sequence title, it could simply have been published later on, when it would fit in. It is more likely that keeping the chronology on track was deemed too difficult and time-consuming, especially with several authors writing the series. Additionally, the company wanted to keep the characters from getting too much older than the readers.¹⁴

The decision to fix the age of the characters certainly had the practical benefit of simplifying the series timeline for the multiple authors writing the books. Trixie's age was frozen at fourteen; if she had continued to age with each book, the risk was that the interest of her target audience would be lost or diminished, putting the popularity and ongoing viability of the series in jeopardy. Basically, Ruth Fielding

¹⁴ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, pp.76-77.

Syndrome¹⁵ had to be avoided if the series was to enjoy continued success. And it was not only the ageing of Trixie to consider; if Trixie aged, the other characters, including the Bob-Whites, would all age too, resulting a shifting, unstable group dynamic.¹⁶ The ‘kids versus adults’ dynamic would also be constantly eroding as the Bob-Whites continued to get older. And of course, why change a winning formula (and an already well-balanced group dynamic)? Thus, from book 17 onwards, the Trixie Belden series officially became ‘series books’ with a heroine who would forever be fourteen years old.

From the early books written by Campbell, Trixie and Jim shared a special bond, which became a great concern to the editors. They were uncomfortable with the idea that Trixie and Jim’s relationship, if allowed to develop with each book, would eventually result in a sexual relationship which of course they wanted to avoid at all costs. Two of the books in particular published before the age-freeze decision featured relationship milestones which indicated tangible progress in the

¹⁵ As mentioned in the previous chapter, The Ruth Fielding series by the Stratemeyer Syndicate declined in popularity once Ruth grew up, got married and became a mother. I refer to children’s series’ demise resulting from the ageing of characters as “Ruth Fielding Syndrome”, usually hastened via “death by marriage” or “death by motherhood”.

¹⁶ A Trixie Belden fan, known as “Kathy K.” produced “If Trixie had aged, how old would she be?”, a timeline of the series and Trixie’s age, book by book, calculated “on the premise that all the books happened chronologically and Trixie was allowed to age as the books went on. Trixie’s birthday is May 1. In doing this, and with that in mind, every time a book takes place in the summer, that marks another year. If there are a few books in a row that take place in the summer, the first book of those following one that didn’t take place in the summer marks the beginning of another year.” Following this assumption, Kathy calculates Trixie’s age to be 21 by books #38 and #39. This would have been potentially problematic, as the books were aimed at primary and lower-secondary school-aged children, and the publisher did not want its series heroines to be much older than the target audience. Following the same seasonal assumptions, the Bob-Whites’ ages are calculated to be as follows at the conclusion of the series: Honey and Di 21; Mart 22; Jim 23; Brian 24; Dan either 22, 23 or 24 (as per the author’s note, there is some discrepancy over Dan’s age, due to inconsistencies in the ghost-written texts). Accessed 4 November 2004, at <http://www.assortedweirdness.com/trixie/timeline.html>.

relationship: in #7 *The Mysterious Code* (1961) Jim is Trixie's date for a Valentine's party and gives her her first corsage, and #9 *The Happy Valley Mystery* (1962) Jim gives Trixie an identification bracelet.¹⁷ The editors expressed a concern about Jim and Trixie eventually sleeping together (which of course would never actually have been written about explicitly in a mass-marketed children's mystery series), but just the implication of teenaged leading characters having a sexual relationship was itself disconcerting and undesirable.¹⁸

The editors at Whitman compiled a booklet of 'Trixie Lore' in the 1970s,¹⁹ a "75-page collection of information given to new series writers as background material",²⁰ and one of their instructions to the ghost-writers was to 'downplay' the

¹⁷ The giving of an identification bracelet, from a boy to a girl usually signified their 'going steady'. I will discuss the implications of this gift for the Trixie Belden series later in the chapter.

¹⁸ Sex, that is, direct references to sexual desire and sexual activity remains the ultimate taboo in children's fiction (that is, books specifically *not* labelled or marketed as Young Adult. YA books push these boundaries a lot more – but I argue in Chapter Six that the themes and content of YA books are driven by similar adult concerns about appropriateness as children's fiction). J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series is in a strange place between the children's and adult's book – the books are knowingly marketed towards a dual audience (even to the extent where there are separate child and adult editions, which have different artwork but contain exactly the same text). The Harry Potter series was written by Rowling to be 'books in series' following the seven years of Harry's schooling at Hogwarts' School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and so Harry and his friends grow older as the books progress. So although Harry was an eleven-year-old child in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (clearly a children's book), he is almost an adult, aged seventeen in the final book. A certain number of the series' readers will have grown up reading the books, but the series continues to be popular with very young readers. The popularity of the series is also fed by the saturation of media coverage, the success of the movies and video games. Rowling is no doubt acutely aware of her multi-aged audience. She has allowed her teenaged, hormonally-charged, maturing characters to engage in 'snogging', but no full-blown description of sexual activity beyond that has been featured. I find it intriguing that children's literature has a kind of 'sacredness' where sex is concerned, and continues to aspire to be the shining knight in defence of the innocence of children in a way that film and television do not.

¹⁹ The 1970s included #16 *The Mystery of the Missing Heiress* (1970) through to #28 *The Hudson River Mystery* (1979).

²⁰ Knight comments on p.78, "The Lore booklet was obviously an attempt to make later books consistent and error-free (although the real-life chronology which had previously existed in the series was thrown out the window). However, the Lore itself was not free from errors." Such errors in the Lore would no doubt have contributed to some of the inconsistencies in the ghost-written

romance.²¹ Trixie and Jim's relationship never progressed beyond the official status of 'special friendship' throughout the series, despite the milestone reached in *The Happy Valley Mystery*. There are hints of more Bob-White couples, namely Di and Mart, and Honey and Brian,²² but this is never fully developed. According to Knight,

...with each edition of the Trixie Belden books, some slight changes were made. In only a few instances are these of any significance, and none changed the stories drastically.²³

Knight compares earliest and latest editions of books 1-15, identifying the differences between original and revised texts.²⁴ References identified as being outdated were changed, such as "Trixie jumped on the running board", to "Trixie

texts, such as Dan's age. Knight has included reproductions of pages from Trixie Lore on pp.180-187.

²¹ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.7.

²² Honey's 'soft spot' for Brian Belden is alluded to, but never officially dealt with in the series. In *The Mystery of the Blinking Eye*. Racine, Wisconsin: Western Publishing, 1977, p.76:

'You always say "ask Jim",' Honey said mischievously. 'Even if he is my brother, I don't think he's all-wise. We'll ask all the Bob-Whites what they think.'

Trixie blushed to the roots of her sandy hair. She hadn't any idea that her complete reliance on Jim was so obvious.

'Of course we'll ask all of them. Brian's pretty smart too. You think so, don't you, Honey?'

It was Honey's turn to blush now...

In #30 *The Mystery of the Midnight Marauder*. Racine, Wisconsin: Western Publishing, 1980, p.210, Jim asks Trixie, Brian asks Honey and Mart asks Di, to the upcoming school dance. The actual school dance is not described in the story, so the readers could only imagine how it went. In her interview with Ernie Campbell, Julie Campbell said, "My fans always wrote me that when Trixie grew up she would marry Jim and Honey would marry Brian. So even if you don't include it, the kids read romance into the books." The child-readers of the books were comfortable fantasising about romance, even if the editors weren't comfortable including it in the books. The readers' eagerness for the pairing up of the Bob-Whites is reminiscent of the readers who so annoyed Louisa May Alcott, writing and eagerly asking who the March sisters would marry.

²³ Knight, M.K. p.306.

²⁴ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, pp.306-406. Most of the changes were, as Knight suggests, minor and pointless, p.309. For example, in *The Secret of the Mansion*, "lambs' quarters" is changed to "lamb's-quarters" Knight, p.306, "so although" to "so, although", p.306 and "pitch black" to "pitch-black", p.307.

leaned into the car” in *The Secret of the Mansion*.²⁵ Presumably a car with running boards was considered too old-fashioned. Although the majority of changes made were inconsequential to the stories themselves: “commas deleted, hyphens added or deleted, longer sentences shortened, shorter sentences lengthened, paragraphs spaced differently, font type changed, etc”,²⁶ particular changes made in the two books which explored and developed Trixie’s femininity and relationship with Jim, *The Mysterious Code* and *The Happy Valley Mystery*, are worthy of closer analysis.²⁷ Any references from the original text versions of *The Mysterious Code* and *The Happy Valley Mystery* in this section have been taken from the reissued texts by Random House (2004). These reissued Random House editions use the original (cellophane edition) text.²⁸

²⁵ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.306.

²⁶ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.309.

²⁷ The Keelines and Knight both suggest that the ghost-writer of these two books was Nicolette Meredith Stack. The Keelines write, “Rather than allow Trixie to remain a tomboy, she introduces a new more feminine side to her character and tries to enhance the romance between Trixie and Jim”, p.6. Also refer to “Stack-ish’ Elements”, in Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, pp. 198-206. According to Knight, “The number of Trixie books written by Nicolette Meredith Stack varies from source to source, so it is not exactly certain how many of the books she wrote, or which ones...”, p.198. Knight suggests “it is almost certain that Stack wrote volumes 7 and 9 because of similarities to her first book, *Two To Get Ready*. The rabbit hunt in volume 9 is almost identical to that in *Two*, including some of the same dialogue”, p.199. Specific examples of this are provided on pp. 199-200. Interestingly, in her interview with Ernie Kelly, Julie Campbell is quoted as saying “My philosophy is to play the field. I couldn't tolerate this going steady stuff. My heroines were plenty attractive. They had lots of beaux”, so it is entirely possible that had Campbell not left the series, the problems caused by books like #7 and #9 may have never occurred.

²⁸ This has been verified in “Q & A with Trixie Editor Jennifer Arena” from the Trixie Belden Fan Club FAQ at the Random House website, accessed 8 November 2004: “We scanned in the text from the earliest editions of the books, which for the first three was the jacketed hardcover and for the next seven was the cellophane editions.” In *Schoolgirl Shamuses, Incorporated*, Melanie Kay Knight uses the cellophane editions as the ‘earliest’ edition texts, and the Golden Press paperback editions as the ‘latest’ edition texts in her comparison of earliest and latest Trixie Belden versions. My quotations from the revised text versions are from Golden Press paperback “Square” editions, published by Western Publishing in 1985 (*The Mysterious Code*) and 1985 (*The Happy Valley Mystery*).

In *The Mysterious Code*, Moms takes Trixie out shopping to buy a new dress and shoes to wear to the upcoming Valentine's dance.²⁹ When Trixie asks Moms, "Have you taken a good look at my freckles lately? And my waist? It's simply *miles* around", the original text has Moms responding with "That's another thing we'll shop for – a girdle".³⁰ In the revised version, Moms suggests "a pretty slip"³¹ instead of a girdle. The original text deals directly with the issue of slimming Trixie's waist:

Before Mrs. Belden and Trixie went to the Teen Town dress department, she first went to the restroom and succeeded, with many a protest from Trixie, in getting her into the girdle. It slimmed her waist amazingly.³²

The revised version does not mention girdle or waist at all:

Then, before they went into the Teen Town dress section of the local department store, they stopped at a small lingerie shop where Mrs. Belden finally succeeded, with many a protest from Trixie, in purchasing a dainty, lacy slip for her daughter.³³

Knight comments on this revision:

Perhaps the greatest and most surprising change is that instead of being fitted into a girdle, Trixie's mother forces her to wear a slip. Why? Girdles still exist, and some women, and even girls, do still wear them, though not

²⁹ Chapter 12, entitled "This can't be I!" The shopping expedition has nothing whatsoever to do with the actual mystery, but takes up a whole chapter.

³⁰ Kenny, K. *The Mysterious Code*, p.176.

³¹ Kenny, K. *The Mysterious Code*, p.129.

³² Kenny, K. *The Mysterious Code*, p.176.

³³ Kenny, K. *The Mysterious Code*, p.129.

nearly as much as they used to. The fact that Trixie has to wear a girdle makes an important difference –we’re given proof that, as we’ve been told, Trixie isn’t exactly svelte. A slip (unless you’re wearing a sheer dress, which she wouldn’t be in winter – and they get the slip before they decide on a dress) doesn’t serve any purpose – it’s sheer pointless torture for Trixie on Mrs. Belden’s part!³⁴

Throughout the series, Trixie’s figure is described as “sturdy”, in contrast to her friends Honey and Di, who are “slender” or “slim”. Trixie is never explicitly described as overweight or plump, but the editors obviously felt that a femininity issue (as represented by a “dainty, lacy slip”) was more appropriate and consistent here than the original weight issue (as represented by a girdle – though, of course, weight could also be seen as a femininity issue). Knight cites Kate Emborg’s thoughts on the girdle to slip change:

The change from girdle to slip is interesting. Having Trixie reluctant to wear a slip doesn’t make the point that (she) is a little heavy. It also seems odd that (she) should be so hostile about wearing slip (which isn’t uncomfortable and doesn’t show) and that Mrs. Belden is so insistent about forcing her to wear one! A girdle makes more sense here, because it *is* uncomfortable, and would be embarrassing for a teen girl to purchase. The fact is, no modern teenager would wear a girdle... but that’s even more of a reason to leave it as a girdle. Trixie would be doubly embarrassed to have

³⁴ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.343.

to stand there while Moms purchases it. Not only is it a comment on her weight, it's too old-fashioned.³⁵

It is likely that the editors felt that a girdle made an unequivocally negative statement about Trixie's weight, whereas descriptions of Trixie using adjectives such as "sturdy" were enough to contrast Trixie's figure with that of her friends. Perhaps if Trixie was perceived as having a weight problem, she would be less likeable as a heroine.³⁶ Moreover, adding yet another layer of complexity to Trixie's character was not necessary to the management and success of the mass-marketed, multiple-authored series. In any case, like Knight, I feel that the change from girdle to slip simply does not make sense because of the order in which the purchases are made.

In *The Happy Valley Mystery*, Trixie gets jealous when another girl shows Jim attention at the basketball game and ice rink. The editors left the jealousy in, but made other changes in their quest to 'downplay' the romance between Trixie and Jim. And so, when Jim tells Trixie, "'I hate to think of my sister and my – well you, Trixie, getting into such tight places all the time'",³⁷ the following paragraph appears in the original: "Trixie didn't have a word to say. She wondered what Jim

³⁵ Kate Emburg, as quoted in Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, pp.343-344.

³⁶ Remember, as per Appendix "Adventure and Mystery Series Group Dynamics", in the Stratemeyer series the fat character usually provided comic relief, and was teased or tormented relentlessly by other characters or the ghost-writers who put the fat characters into embarrassing or funny situations. Bess Marvin of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories and Chet Morton from the Hardy Boys series are examples of this. I honestly believe that the last thing Whitman editors wanted was the perception that Trixie Belden was fat, simply because of the negative connotations of being overweight. It was fine for minor characters to be overweight, but not one of the stars, one of the heroines.

³⁷ Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery*, p 236 (OT); p.203 (RT).

had been about to say. She asked herself, *Was he going to say that I'm his best girlfriend? Darn it, now I'll never know*";³⁸ this paragraph has been completely removed in the revised version. When Jim gives Trixie an identification bracelet, as they sit on the plane going home, the revised text reads:

Trixie opened the box. She stared at the dainty silver identification bracelet that nestled there. 'It has your name on it, Jim,' she said and smiled shyly at him. 'Put it on for me, will you?'

'You know what it means, don't you?' Jim asked.

'Tell me,' Trixie answered.

'It means that you're my special girl, Trixie,' Jim said. 'As if you didn't know that already.'

The plane lifted. The landscape below grew smaller. Blue sky and clouds surrounded them.

Trixie looked happily at her bracelet, then reached over and put her small, sturdy hand into Jim's. He closed his long fingers tightly over it.

With a sigh of complete happiness, Trixie settled back contentedly.³⁹

In the original version, Trixie responds to being told by Jim that she is his special girl: "'I do,' Trixie murmured. 'Oh, Jim!'"⁴⁰ This enthusiastic, emotional response has been completely removed in the revised version. And instead of the original ending as quoted above, "With a sigh of complete happiness, Trixie settled back and closed her eyes", the revised version has the slightly less romantic image of

³⁸ Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery* (OT), p 236.

³⁹ Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery* (RT), p 212.

⁴⁰ Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery* (OT), p 247.

“...Trixie settled back contentedly”, which sounds more like she’s just finished eating a satisfying meal than been given a special romantic gift!

The identification bracelet has been a source of confusion and questions from fans of the series. The giving of an identification bracelet from a boy to a girl was not a casual act; it signified (as Jim asked, ““You know what it means, don’t you?””) the couple reaching a new and formal phase of their relationship: going steady. The giving of the bracelet (or other jewelry) was a declaration of commitment; boy and girl became boyfriend and girlfriend. The identification bracelet-giving described in *The Happy Valley Mystery* is reminiscent of a similar scene in Beverly Cleary’s *Fifteen* (1956). In this climactic scene, Stan has just clasped his identification bracelet around Jane’s wrist:

She really was wearing Stan’s bracelet on her arm, something she had scarcely allowed herself to think about – at least not often; it would be so far in the future, if it happened at all. And now it happened, months before she had dreamed it could. Jane’s wrist felt small and feminine in the circle of heavy silver links. Tenderly she caressed the letters of Stan’s name with her finger tips.⁴¹

And afterwards, the conversation between Stan and Jane is remarkably similar to that of Trixie and Jim in the original version:

Stan started the car and headed toward Blossom Street. ‘Jane,’ he said urgently, above the sound of the model-A motor, ‘you know what it means

⁴¹ Cleary, Beverly. *Fifteen*. New York: William Morrow, 1956, pp.250-251.

to wear a fellow's bracelet?'

'Yes,' answered Jane breathlessly.

'It means you're going steady.'

'I know.' Jane touched the bracelet.

'You really want to?'

'Yes, Stan. I really want to.'⁴²

The editors feared that this significant milestone in Trixie and Jim's relationship would lead to something too 'serious' for its target audience (it also signified another milestone towards 'maturity' for Trixie). The revised text therefore has removed Trixie's original 'dreamy' response to the gift, which has the effect of downplaying its significance.

Following this event, there is only a fleeting reference to the bracelet in #10 *The Marshland Mystery* (1962):

Her [*Honey's*] eyes twinkled with mischief as she glanced at the identification bracelet on Trixie's wrist.

Trixie's cheeks got red as she flashed a reproachful look at her best friend, then pulled her sweater sleeve down over the inexpensive gift that Honey's adopted brother had given her after their adventurous Easter holiday at Trixie's uncle's farm in Iowa.

Honey and Di knew it wasn't really a sentimental gift, but they liked to make Trixie blush...⁴³

⁴² Cleary, B. *Fifteen*, p.252.

Even this reference to the bracelet tries to downplay its significance by suggesting “it wasn’t really a sentimental gift”, but surely the giving of the bracelet, even the revised version, is described in a sentimental, romantic and meaningful tone. Knight writes about this puzzling (non-)development:

...which leads the reader to wonder – what happened? He gave her a bracelet – did he take it back? Did they break up? According to Trixie editor and author Laura French, downplaying the romance was part of the ‘slippery slope’ fear that also led to the characters being frozen in age. In this case, the publishers were afraid that if the series continued, each author would take the romance a step further, and ‘eventually they have to wind up in bed.’ So later books would generally reiterate that there was a ‘special feeling’ between Trixie and Jim, and leave it at that.⁴⁴

The bracelet and what it symbolised, the reaching of a significant milestone in Trixie and Jim’s relationship is never mentioned again. In fact, in later books although it is emphasised that Jim is very important to Trixie, they are never referred to as boyfriend and girlfriend. In #13 *The Mystery on Cobbett’s Island*, for example, Jim’s special interest in Trixie is alluded to:

Jim jumped out to help Trixie with her bag, and after the other luggage had been put in the rack on top of the car, he managed, by some unobtrusive manoeuvring, to seat himself next to her on the backseat.⁴⁵

⁴³ Kenny, K. *The Marshland Mystery* (RT). Racine, WI: Western Publishing, n.d., p.19, my parentheses.

⁴⁴ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.7.

⁴⁵ Kenny, K. *The Mystery on Cobbett’s Island*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, n.d., p.28.

Later in the story, Jim even notices Trixie's new bathing suit: "On the way over, Jim, looking intently at Trixie, said, 'Isn't that a new suit, Trix? Nice color.' Without waiting for an answer, he dashed ahead to talk to Brian and Mart".⁴⁶ The editors were obviously more comfortable with little hints such as these, or even statements, such as the following, in #24 *The Mystery at Saratoga* (1979):

All of the Bob-Whites knew about the special friendship that existed between Jim and Trixie, and it, too, was a cause for teasing from Mart Belden. Trixie firmly denied to the other Bob-Whites, and usually to herself, as well, that Jim was a 'boyfriend.' Still, she had to admit that, at times, his opinion of her was more important than that of anyone outside her family.⁴⁷

These sorts of statements are tolerated within the texts, but no grand relationship gestures or milestones are ever featured again in any of the books.

As the series progressed, the focus on Trixie's struggles with femininity and growing up became less prominent (and of course, there were no more events of romantic significance), as the books became shorter, less focused on character development and more focused on plot.

Volumes 17 through 34 were approximately 20-30 pages shorter than the average length of the previous 16 volumes, and the font size also grew larger, so that there were fewer words on each page. Books from volume 35 on have only approximately 190 pages, a big drop from the length of the

⁴⁶ Kenny, K. *The Mystery on Cobbett's Island*, p.69.

⁴⁷ Kenny, K. *The Mystery at Saratoga*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, 1979, p.56.

original books – indicating a significant drop in the targeted reading age. Corresponding with this, Trixie and her friends seem younger and less knowledgeable in these books, as well. For example, in volume 10, *The Marshland Mystery*, Brian knew all about botany, but in volume 19, *The Secret of the Unseen Treasure*, when Jim says ‘I’m no botanist,’ Brian replies, ‘Neither am I.’⁴⁸

Writing Trixie and her friends as younger and less knowledgeable would keep them clearly within the safe category of ‘children’, and close off the possibility for the development of problematic relationships, sexual desire and knowledge.

Textual analysis – a closer look at Trixie Belden

Trixie Belden is established as a tomboy when we first meet her in *The Secret of the Mansion* (1948). She has short, sandy curls.⁴⁹ She tends to express her feelings hyperbolically, telling her mother “‘I’ll just die if I don’t have a horse’”,⁵⁰ echoing the desires of many girls who would have read the books. When we meet her, she has been working in the garden, with her mother. She is not squeamish when it comes to creepy-crawlies: “she scooped up a fat little worm, watched it wriggle in the palm of her hand for a minute, then gently let it go”.⁵¹ She wipes her dirty hands on her jeans.⁵² She does her chores, but doesn’t like having to do them:

⁴⁸ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.8.

⁴⁹ Kenny, K. *The Secret of the Mansion*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, n.d., p.13.

⁵⁰ Kenny, K. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.13.

⁵¹ Kenny, K. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.13.

⁵² Kenny, K. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.17.

“She was tired of working in the garden, and she despised any kind of housework”.⁵³

Trixie meets Madeleine “Honey” Wheeler, a girl who has just moved into the manor house next door with her parents. As it happens, Honey’s father is a millionaire.⁵⁴ The first description of Honey is not particularly distinctive, as we see her through Trixie’s first impressions. We are told that Honey is “a tall, thin girl whose pale face was framed by shoulder-length, light-brown hair”.⁵⁵ As the series progresses and Trixie’s affection for her best friend grows, Honey grows prettier and is described more positively. For example, in #4 *The Mysterious Visitor*, the description of Honey is as follows: “She had earned her nickname because of her golden-brown hair, and she had wide hazel eyes. Although they were the same age, Honey was taller and slimmer than Trixie”.⁵⁶ In #8 *The Black Jacket Mystery* (1961), the description is similarly positive: “Honey was taller and slimmer than Trixie, although they were practically the same age. Her shoulder-length light brown hair and her soft hazel eyes had brought her the nickname of Honey”.⁵⁷ In #14 *The Mystery of the Emeralds* (1965), “Honey’s real name was Madeleine, but

⁵³ Kenny, K. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.22.

⁵⁴ The Wheelers’ wealth is very convenient for the series; while many of the mysteries take place in Sleepyside, the Wheelers’ money finances trips to different locations to provide variations in the setting of the mysteries, for example, Saratoga (*The Mystery at Saratoga*) and Vermont (*The Mystery at Mead’s Mountain*), and even international destinations such as London (*The Mystery of the Queen’s Necklace*). Despite having the convenience of millionaire characters, the series emphasises the ideologically acceptable value of working hard; the Bob-Whites, for example, follow a self-decreed rule “that no member of the club could contribute money which he or she had not earned” (*The Mystery off Old Glen Road*, p.15). To raise money to repair their clubhouse, Honey does mending (sewing), Jim works as a handyman, and Trixie contributes her weekly allowance, hard-earned by doing household chores and looking after her trouble-prone six-year-old brother, Bobby.

⁵⁵ Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.22.

⁵⁶ Campbell, J. *The Mysterious Visitor*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, n.d., p.14.

⁵⁷ Kenny, K. *The Black Jacket Mystery*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, 1977, p.17.

no one ever called her that now, and no one seemed to remember who first gave her the nickname. Everyone agreed, however, that it suited her perfectly, for Honey was always cheerful and sweet as she was pretty.”⁵⁸ And in #21 *The Mystery of the Castaway Children* (1978), “That was certainly true in Honey’s case, Trixie thought fondly. She’d earned her nickname for her golden brown hair and melting brown eyes, as well as for the genuine sweetness of her disposition”.⁵⁹

All of these descriptions, which occur at the beginning of each book, are similar to those of George and Bess at the beginning of each Nancy Drew mystery; they contribute towards building up a strong sense of the contrast, physical and in temperament, between Trixie and Honey as well as emphasizing their identifying characteristics. In #28 *The Hudson River Mystery* (1979), they are described as thus:

Trixie was more quick-tempered and impetuous than Honey, who tended to hang back until she was really sure of her ground. Honey’s caution provided a balance to Trixie’s forcefulness, just as her tall, slim figure and long golden hair provided a contrast to Trixie’s strong, sturdy figure and short sandy curls.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Emeralds*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, n.d., p.16.

⁵⁹ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Castaway Children*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, 1978, p.59.

⁶⁰ Kenny, K. *The Hudson River Mystery*. Racine, WI: Golden Press, Western Publishing, 1979, p.19. In this mystery, Trixie and Honey decide to go to a costume party dressed as each other, with amusing results, described on p.171:

Trixie was able to fit into Honey’s clothes, but because Honey was taller, the skirt hung down to a ludicrous length, the trim vest became lumpy, and the blouse sleeves hampered Trixie’s fingers. Honey, on the other hand, looked like a scarecrow, in loose-fitting jeans that stopped well above her ankles and a sweater with sleeves that stopped well above her wrists.

Trixie acknowledges and even admires Honey's sweetness, even-temperedness and tactfulness; Trixie is hot-tempered and often speaks without considering the consequences or tone of her words.⁶¹ Their relationship is very different to that of Bess and George in the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories. George constantly teases and reprimands Bess for the aspects of her personality that differ to George: Bess's gluttony, her love of shopping, cosmetics, clothes and boys, her squeamishness. Trixie, on the other hand, admires the qualities that Honey possesses that she does not possess herself, and is sensitive, rather than scornful, towards Honey's fears.⁶² But although Trixie and Honey's relationship dynamic is different to that of George and Bess, the way their characters are constructed within the narrative is very much the same – their relationship and identities are based on their contrast to one another.

Trixie does not warm to Honey initially. When they first meet, Honey shakes Trixie's hand, and Trixie is uncomfortable with the formality of the gesture.

Trixie shook hands, feeling rather foolish at such a display of formality.

Oh, my, she thought, almost sick with disappointment, she's stuck-up. Who

⁶¹ For example, in #28 *The Hudson River Mystery*, Brian reprimands Trixie: "'You want to be a detective so much that you leap to conclusions too quickly – conclusions that could hurt people...'" Trixie nodded, surprised at Brian's vehemence but aware that he was right. *This isn't the first time I've been accused of speaking before thinking*, she scolded herself", p.88.

⁶² In a way, Trixie and Honey's relationship is very similar to that of Darrell Rivers and Sally Hope, in Enid Blyton's Malory Towers series. Darrell is hot-tempered, while Sally is calm (although Darrell, strictly speaking, is not a tomboy, it is the balance and contrast of personalities that are relevant in this example). Sally constantly defuses situations where Darrell has lost, or is about to lose, her temper (Blyton uses the phrase "pouring oil over the troubled waters" regularly to describe the effect Sally has on Darrell).

would go around in a white linen dress and stockings and sandals unless there's a party?⁶³

Honey's ex-governess Miss Trask,⁶⁴ who now fulfils the role of manager of the Wheeler household in the absence of Honey's parents (who are often away on business trips), instigates a wardrobe change and transformation for Honey:

She glanced approvingly at Trixie's dungarees... [To Honey] 'Now that we're in the country, you really ought to dress the way Trixie does. I'll speak to your mother right away about getting you some blue jeans and loafers'.⁶⁵

Initially, Trixie is reluctant to befriend Honey, who seems to possess none of Trixie's natural exuberance and spunk. But then, Trixie finds out that the Wheelers own horses! Regan, the Wheelers' groom, tells Trixie she is "a natural-born rider",⁶⁶ however, Trixie disobeys Regan and rides Jupiter although she isn't ready;

⁶³ Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.23.

⁶⁴ Miss Trask is an interesting supporting character. In #23 *The Mystery of the Queen's Necklace*, we are told: "No one knew how old Miss Trask was. She never let on. She was attractive in a brisk, trim way, with her bright blue eyes and short, silver-grey hair. She always dressed sensibly but well, in tailored suits and sturdy shoes. Sometimes the Bob-Whites liked to tease her about a romantic interest... Her response to such teasing was always a calm smile that revealed absolutely nothing, and the Bob-Whites usually assumed that her busy life left no room for romance" (p.30). While the presence of a "sensibly-dressed", short-haired, middle-aged unmarried woman might rouse suspicions in eagle-eyed lesbian-spotters, such speculation is quashed in *Queen's Necklace*. Poor Miss Trask is almost (but not, thanks mainly to Trixie) swept off her feet by a fast-talking, suave con-man.

⁶⁵ Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.29, my italics. Trixie's tomboyishness is a sign that she is still a girl and not yet matured. In #4 *The Mysterious Visitor*, Miss Trask explains, "Mrs. Wheeler doesn't want Honey to grow up too fast. We want her to be a tomboy like you, Trixie, for as long as possible", p.45. This reflects the sentiments of the editors, who did not want Trixie or the other characters to grow up too quickly. Trixie is not comfortable with femininity, which associated with growing up: "One thing she hadn't liked about entering junior high was that none of the girls wore jeans to school anymore" (*The Mysterious Visitor*, p.34).

⁶⁶ Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.81.

she is unable to control Jupiter and gets thrown (thankfully though, she is not seriously injured).⁶⁷

Trixie's affinity for horses extends to nature in general. She is perfectly comfortable and knowledgeable in the surrounding natural environment. Honey, however, is the complete opposite; her ignorance makes her fearful. Much like Bess Marvin in the original *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, Honey is frightened of touching worms, and as a result is not keen to go fishing, as demonstrated when the excited Trixie sees a new rowboat tied alongside the Wheelers' boathouse near the lake:

‘Oh boy!’ she shouted. ‘Now we can fish in the middle of the lake. You’re a lucky duck to live up here, Honey!’

‘I don’t know how to fish,’ Honey said quickly. ‘And I wouldn’t touch a horrible squirming worm for anything!’

The word ‘Sissy!’ was on the tip of Trixie’s tongue, but she caught herself just in time. ‘I’ll put the worms on the hook,’ she said.⁶⁸

In the woods, Honey is jumpy and apprehensive:

Honey jumped as a chipmunk appeared from nowhere and scurried across the path. ‘Regan told me there were foxes and skunks in these woods,’ she said with a little shiver. ‘Do you think one of them will attack us, Trixie?’

⁶⁷ Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, pp.82-85.

⁶⁸ Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.37.

Golly, she is nervous, Trixie thought. She said out loud, ‘Of course they won’t, silly. Wild animals never attack humans unless we attack them first’.⁶⁹

Trixie, familiar with the woods and its inhabitants, smells a skunk nearby; when one appears on the trail, she asks Honey, “‘Isn’t he cute?’” Honey, of course, is frightened of the skunk and disagrees: “‘It’s a horrible, smelly creature, and it’ll squirt that awful stuff all over us’”.⁷⁰ Trixie tries to educate Honey about skunks, to assuage her fears,⁷¹ but by this time Honey wants to go home because she is even more afraid of skunks!

Trixie displays great courage in this book; when her brother Bobby is bitten by a copperhead snake, she quickly administers first aid (using the cut-suck-method, and then a tourniquet) to treat the bite, saving his life.⁷² Later on, a mad dog on the loose injures Queenie the little black game hen’s wing, and Trixie stops at nothing to rescue her:

She was out of the window and across the clearing in a second, tearing at the vines and branches that cut off her view of Queenie’s hiding place. Then she got down on her hands and knees and began crawling after the game hen. Sharp twigs scratched her face and pulled her curly brown hair, but she struggled on.⁷³

⁶⁹ Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.57.

⁷⁰ Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.57.

⁷¹ Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.58.

⁷² Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, pp.70-75.

⁷³ Campbell, J. *The Secret of the Mansion*, p.89.

Trixie's influence on Honey is presented as a positive one. As a result of being Trixie's friend, Honey slowly comes out of her shell, learns not to be so frightened of nature and takes on a more healthy appearance overall. In *The Mystery at Saratoga*, we are told just how much Honey has changed, from Trixie's influence:

Honey had been frail and timid, frightened of her own shadow, when she moved to Sleepyside. But the time she'd spent with 'tomboy Trixie' had changed all that. This summer, she was brown as a berry and just as ready for mischief as was her sandy-haired, freckle-faced friend.⁷⁴

Through her exposure to Honey, Trixie (and, no doubt the readers too) learns a valuable lesson – not to judge a book by its cover. As Trixie talks to Moms about her new friend, she tells her how her impressions of Honey changed as she got to know her:

'She *is* just lovely in every way,' Trixie cried enthusiastically. 'I wasn't crazy about her at first, Moms. I thought she was a sissy. But she isn't. She's scared and nervous about a lot of things because she isn't used to living in the country. I mean, she's sure that every ropelike vine is a snake and all leaves are poison ivy, and things like that. And, of course, not having had any brothers makes an awful difference'.⁷⁵

Trixie, like most of the tomboys discussed in this thesis, detests housework and is no good at sewing. Unfortunately for her, BWG club rules decree that all

⁷⁴ Kenny, K. *The Mystery at Saratoga*, p.15

⁷⁵ Kenny, K. *The Mystery at Saratoga*, p.141

members must keep their club jackets clean and in good repair at all times or be fined. Not surprisingly, Trixie struggles with this, as we are told in #20 *The Mystery Off Old Telegraph Road*:

Honey and Di, who always took care to be well groomed, rarely had to pay the fine. Mart, with his love of food, was frequently caught with some remnants of his last meal or snack on his shirt. Trixie, who hated any kind of sewing chore, seemed always to be caught with a torn seam or a missing button...⁷⁶

Two essential ingredients for successful sewing are simply not compatible with Trixie: sitting still, and sustained, careful concentration. Like Laura Ingalls, Trixie is an active person, happiest when she is outdoors and freely on the move:

She wished she had Honey's love for sewing. But Trixie couldn't even master simple things like buttons, much less the kind of beautiful needlework that Honey could do.

*...I'd go wild if I had to sit still long enough to sew even the simplest skirt. Besides, the beautiful things Honey sews look wonderful on her, but all of my things get wrinkled or stained the minute I put them on. I guess that's why they call me 'Tomboy Trixie.'*⁷⁷

Trixie is a tomboy, but she does not wish she was a boy, as George of the Famous Five does. In *The Gatehouse Mystery*, Trixie urges Honey not to tell Jim about the

⁷⁶ Kenny, K. *The Mystery off Old Telegraph Road*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, 1978, p.140.

⁷⁷ Kenny, K. *The Mystery off Old Telegraph Road*, p.141. This quote sounds remarkably similar to the one from Ingalls Wilder's *The Long Winter*, p.31, quoted in Chapter Two: "Sewing made Laura feel like flying to pieces. She wanted to scream. The back of her neck ached and the thread twisted and knotted. She had to pick out almost as many stitches as she put in."

diamond they have found, especially since he teased them earlier, calling them “Schoolgirl Shamuses Incorporated”. Trixie tells Honey,

...girls can be just as smart as boys, and there’s no reason why women detectives shouldn’t be even better than men. It’s a known fact that women notice little things more than men do.⁷⁸

She goes on to prove this by asking Jim what Mrs. Wheeler was wearing at dinner. Of course, Jim’s poor skills of observation prove Trixie’s point. Knight suggests that Trixie

...never feels that she has to or should be a boy... she feels stifled at times by male authority, but she is determined to succeed on her own... to vindicate the right of the individual to be an individual, not try to conform to society’s stereotype of what a female ‘should’ be.⁷⁹

I do agree with this statement in part; Trixie definitely does not feel that she should be a boy, and is a proactive, determined girl. However, as I will show, she is undeniably influenced by society’s stereotype of what a female should be and constantly thinks about and tries to confirm to a particular standard of femininity.

Trixie constantly compares herself with other girls. She resists femininity, but is nevertheless compelled by a strong desire to fit in and to gain the approval of others. She feels she is different to the more ‘naturally’ and comfortably feminine girls, yet she wants to fit in with them. She recognises the feminine girls as ‘normal’

⁷⁸ Campbell, J. *The Gatehouse Mystery*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, 1977, p.41.

⁷⁹ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.71.

and feels that she should be more like them; she identifies a need to change her behaviour, her attitude and appearance. She never considers the possibility that it might be the other girls who should change to be more like her. Trixie's two best friends Honey and Di are feminine and pretty, and set the feminine standard that Trixie, although ambivalent, still clearly aspires to. In *The Mysterious Code*, Trixie tells her mother

'Honey and Di can put on anything and look beautiful,' Trixie said, not at all enviously. 'Honey is just gorgeous, and you know it. And Di is even prettier. Everyone at Sleepyside High thinks Di is the prettiest girl in the class'.⁸⁰

One area in which Trixie compares herself to her feminine friends is in perspiration and dishevelment. The series associates perspiration and dishevelment with the tomboy, and 'freshness', 'coolness' and neatness (as the result of *non*-perspiration!) with the feminine girl. My initial thought was that the tomboy, being the active girl, would perspire more than the passive feminine girl, but then in *The Mystery of the Emeralds*, we are told that although Di has just run all the way to the clubhouse,

...she looked as fresh and cool as always... *How does she always manage to look so unruffled?* Trixie thought as she involuntarily tucked in her own blouse and pulled up her socks. *I'm always such a frump!*⁸¹

⁸⁰ Kenny, K. *The Mysterious Code*, p.129.

⁸¹ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Emeralds*, p.65.

So apparently, something other than being active causes perspiration and dishevelment. Trixie fights a constant battle with perspiration. She is embarrassed and frustrated by her sweating, and observes that her feminine friends are not affected by sweat as she is. Trixie's shamefulness and discomfort from her sweating is a manifestation of the idea of the feminine that denies and/or conceals natural female/human bodily functions, including perspiration, menstruation and the growth of body hair.⁸²

The Mystery of the Missing Millionaire is set during the worst heatwave ever experienced in Sleepyside. While out on horseback on yet another hot day, Trixie is preoccupied with her thoughts and physical discomfort as a result of her sweating:

Trixie wiped her brow with the back of her hand and looked at her friend enviously. Even in the middle of the worst heat wave in the history of Sleepyside-on-the-Hudson, Honey managed to look cool and neat. Her shoulder-length blonde hair was held back with a barrette at the nape of her neck, and even after an hour's hard riding, not a single hair was out of place. Her skin had a rosy glow, and her hazel eyes sparkled – and wonder of wonders, her cotton blouse still had neat creases running down the sleeves.

Even in the middle of the woods, miles from the nearest mirror, Trixie knew that her own disheveled appearance was a startling contrast to

⁸² Regarding menstruation and the gaze, see Treneman, Ann. "Cashing in on the Curse: Advertising and the Menstrual Taboo" in Gamman, Lorraine, and Margaret Marshment. *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*. London: Women's Press, 1988, pp.153-165. Also see Frost, Liz. *Young Women and the Body*. Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp.71-75.

Honey's neatness. Trixie's curly hair had a mind of its own, and by now it would be a mass of tangled, sandy-colored ringlets, with dripping darker strands on her forehead and in front of her ears. Her healthy complexion, she knew, now would almost be scarlet – but that wouldn't hide the freckles that were scattered generously across her nose. Trixie looked down at her T-shirt, which had been clean and fresh that morning when she'd put it on. Only four hours later, it looked slept-in and had a big smudge of dirt across the front.

'Oh, Honey, I don't know how you do it,' Trixie wailed.

Honey looked startled. 'What do I do?' she asked, sounding a bit defensive.

'You manage to stay clean and fresh and neat, no matter what. But I –' Trixie waved one hand at her T-shirt, offering her appearance as a conclusion to her sentence.⁸³

Later, at dinner in the Belden household, Trixie is still troubled by her perspiration. Her father comments, "'There's nothing like a little exercise for putting an attractive, rosy glow in your cheeks'", to which Trixie replies, "'What Honey gets is an attractive, rosy glow. What I get is red and sweaty'".⁸⁴

As girls grow up, they are taught to conceal certain functions and products of the body. We learn to be embarrassed and ashamed. We want to fit in; we do not

⁸³ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Missing Millionaire*. Racine, WI: Golden Press, Western Publishing, 1980, p.15.

⁸⁴ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Missing Millionaire*, pp.67-68. There is a saying: "Horses sweat, men perspire, and women (sometimes quoted as *ladies*) glow". Honey is a 'woman'; not only does she "glow", she does so rosily and attractively. Poor Trixie sweats, and so what does that make her?

want anyone to point at us or look at us appraisingly and award us a failing grade. Consequently, perspiration is kept under control with deodorants and perfumes; hair that grows where we think it shouldn't is removed. Just as a girl is expected to learn to stifle her tomboyish impulses, she will also learn to control her sweating and appearance as part of her acceptance of femininity and appropriate gendered behaviour. Trixie Belden, as a tomboy and coming of age figure is in a difficult place: between the blissful ignorance/resistance of the girl, and the knowledge/desire of the woman to fit the feminine standard.

Trixie's preoccupation and self-consciousness about her appearance during the heat wave continues when she goes to the general store. She gazes appraisingly and comparatively at a female stranger:

Trixie stopped short when she saw Mr. Lytell's customer, self-consciously running a hand through her tangled curls. The young woman seemed to be about twenty years old. She was tall and slender, with blond hair that formed a cascading mane down to her shoulders. She was wearing a simple sundress and thick-soled sandals. A thin gold chain encircled one wrist, and a small gold dot decorated each of her ears.⁸⁵

Trixie gazes and notices great details about the stranger's appearance, as described in this passage: the stranger's physical features, her clothing and her jewelry. In *The Gatehouse Mystery*, Trixie proudly tells Honey that girls are more observant than boys; Trixie is able to recall the details of Mrs. Wheeler's outfit when Jim can't.

⁸⁵ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Missing Millionaire*, p.46.

This does not only suggest that Trixie is a very observant person or a highly skilled sleuth; Trixie has learned how to *gaze*. Trixie gazes upon the stranger in Mr. Lytell's store, Mrs. Wheeler, Honey, Di, and every other female she comes into contact with. She notices physical signifiers of femininity; elements of body, of costume and adornment. She notices how other women perform femininity. She observes, appraises, imitates, covets and envies.⁸⁶

Myra MacDonald makes the assertion that "The body has historically been much more integral to the formation of identity for women than for men".⁸⁷ She writes,

The body's traditional centrality to feminine identity can be subdivided into a variety of codes of appearance: ideal bodily shape and size; appropriate forms of make-up and cosmetic care of skin and hair; and the adornment of the body through clothes and accessories. It is not the body, but the codifying of the body into structures of appearance, that culturally shapes and moulds what it means to be 'feminine'.⁸⁸

Trixie Belden's constant, critical gaze upon herself and other females is a demonstration of MacDonald's argument. And, as Jackie Stacey asserts,

⁸⁶ Furthermore, in *The Mystery of the Missing Heiress*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, n.d., pp.88-89, Trixie complains about her curly hair, comparing herself to Jim's straight-haired cousin Juliana:

Jim's cousin is one of the most beautiful girls I ever saw, and so nice... She wears her hair straight back from her forehead, like this.' Trixie struggled to straighten her unruly short curls. 'I wish I had been born with straight hair. The only place curly hair looks good is on poodles.'

⁸⁷ MacDonald, Myra. *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*. London, New York: Edward Arnold, 1995, p.193.

⁸⁸ MacDonald, M. *Representing Women*, p.194.

In a culture where the circulation of idealized and desirable images of femininity constantly surrounds us, the phenomenon of fascination between women is hardly surprising.⁸⁹

Stacey's paper examines the place of women's desire towards women within the frame of narrative cinema. Trixie Belden's desire is not for the females she turns her gaze on; her desire is for the femininity they perform. She also desires to perform this femininity correctly herself.⁹⁰

Later in *The Mystery of the Missing Millionaire*, Trixie is troubled by the interest Jim shows in the female stranger, whom they now know to be Laura Ramsey.

She walked to her dresser and looked sternly at herself in the mirror.

‘You’re being just plain foolish, Trixie Belden,’ she said out loud.
‘The handsome prince Laura Ramsey is counting on to rescue her isn’t Jim; it’s the detective she’s hiring. And that detective will be just as interesting to you and Honey as he is helpful to Laura Ramsey.’”

Trixie's voice sounded strong and convincing, but the blue eyes that stared back at her from the mirror didn't look convinced at all.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Stacey, J. “Desperately Seeking Difference” from Gamman, Lorraine and Margaret Marshment, eds. *The female gaze: women as viewers of popular culture*. London: Women's Press, 1988, p.114.

⁹⁰ Judith Butler writes, “[t]he social constraints upon gender compliance and deviation are so great that most people feel deeply wounded if they are told they exercise their manhood or womanhood improperly”, in “Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault (1987)” in Salih, S., ed. with J. Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.27. Trixie's intense desire exercise her “womanhood” properly drives her keen observation of other females, and her comparison of herself to them.

⁹¹ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Missing Millionaire*, pp.78-79.

Trixie makes a special effort with her appearance, before going to the Wheelers' home to meet with the private detective. Instead of feeling empowered, positive and self-confident, however, Trixie still consciously compares herself to 'other' females, and a standard she does not meet. Liz Frost writes about this "beauty imperative" against which most adolescent girls are "likely to estimate [themselves] as wanting".⁹²

She ran upstairs, showered, and washed her hair. With a towel wrapped around her, she rummaged in a drawer next to the sink for the old toothbrush she used for her nails. Finding it, she scrubbed every bit of dirt from under and around her nails. Then she slathered lotion over her hands and looked approvingly at the result: *Her no-nonsense short nails and stubby fingers didn't look elegant, by any means*, but the nails were gleaming white, and the hands looked and felt soft and smooth.

Trixie towel-dried her hair, then went to her room and brushed it vigorously, taking out some of the unruly curl and leaving soft, sandy ringlets.

She went to her closet and flipped through the hangers, pushing the faded pale blue jeans out of the way. She found a pair of pale blue slacks and a thin gingham blouse that she hadn't worn since school had let out in June. She put them on and checked the effect in the mirror. *She wasn't as beautiful as Laura Ramsey, she knew*, but today she wouldn't feel like a frog looking up at a princess, either.⁹³

⁹² Frost, Liz. *Young Women and the Body: A Feminist Sociology*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, p.75, my parentheses.

⁹³ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Missing Millionaire*, pp.84-85, my italics.

When Trixie arrives at the Wheeler household, she is aware of Honey's appraising gaze on her:

She saw Honey's eyes glance over her appraisingly, and she realized, uncomfortably, that her best friend had noticed the difference in her appearance, even though she was too tactful to mention it.⁹⁴

There is no escape from the gaze – gazing at others and being the object of the gaze of others. As John Berger states:

One might simplify this by saying: *men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. *This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves*. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.⁹⁵

I do not agree with the notion, also discussed at great length by Laura Mulvey, that only men act, that only men gaze, or that the spectator/gaze of the spectator can only be masculine.⁹⁶ Trixie Belden gazes as a female, conscious of the male gaze, as do Honey, Di, and any of the other females. In addition to determining “*not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves*”, the Trixie Belden series also shows that this determines *the relations between women*.

⁹⁴ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Missing Millionaire*, p.88.

⁹⁵ Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC/Penguin, 1972, p.47, second italics mine.

⁹⁶ Refer to Mulvey, Laura, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” pp. 14-26 and “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946)” pp. 29-38, in *Visual and Other Pleasures*. London: MacMillan, 1989.

Trixie, then, is acutely aware of her friends' physical appearance and continually compares her physical appearance to theirs. Although she is not keen to get 'dressed up' in *The Mystery at Mead's Mountain* ("she couldn't wait to change out of the party dress she found so uncomfortable and into jeans and a sweater"⁹⁷), she is interested enough in her appearance to secretly compare her outfit with those of her friends:

Honey's blue and brown outfit and Di's purple ensemble both had come from an exclusive ski shop, but Trixie felt that their outfits weren't any more becoming than her own. The cream and powder blue sweater Moms had knit her for Christmas went perfectly with the blue skin pants that Brian and Mart had given her. You couldn't buy a sweater as special as Moms could make. Trixie could tell by the approving looks she received that she looked nice.⁹⁸

In #17 *The Mystery of the Uninvited Guest* (1977), Trixie's cousin Hallie Belden comes to stay. A significant portion of the story revolves around Trixie's negative feelings towards her cousin. As Trixie watches her brothers welcoming Hallie upon her arrival, she resents her brothers' attention to Hallie, and she identifies Hallie as a potential competitive threat for Jim's attention (just as she does in the example of Laura Ramsey in *Missing Millionaire*, as cited earlier):

Both Brian and Mart hurried up the steps, hands outstretched. Trixie lagged behind. This summer of her fourteenth year had been going so well. What had she done to deserve a visit from a cousin who'd outgrown her by three

⁹⁷ Kenny, K. *The Mystery at Mead's Mountain*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, 1978, p.28.

⁹⁸ Kenny, K. *The Mystery at Mead's Mountain*, p.89.

inches? Merely by looking through a veil of long black lashes, Hallie reduced two teen-age boys to pulp. If she did this to Brian and Mart, who were her cousins and therefore somewhat immune, what would she do to Dan Mangan – and –

The thought was so prickly that Trixie tried not to finish the sentence, but her stubbornly logical mind whispered, *and to Jim Frayne!*⁹⁹

Trixie's appraising gaze continues when she and Hallie spend time with Honey and Di:

As she had promised, Honey took the girls up to her room once they reached Manor House. There both Di and Hallie changed into comfortable jeans and blouses. 'Am I presentable now?' Hallie asked.

'You're so pretty, Hallie, you'd look good in a gunnysack,' answered Di. She locked arms with Hallie and guided her into the hall...

She watched the two dark-haired girls do down the wide stairs. It was an accepted fact that Di was the prettiest girl in the club. But now? Trixie was not so sure that even an Irish pixie with black hair and violet eyes could compete with a girl who looked and walked like an Indian princess. If someone like Di took a backseat, what chance did Trixie have?¹⁰⁰

Throughout the series, we are told that Trixie's brother Mart, who is eleven months older, is her 'almost-twin':

⁹⁹ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Uninvited Guest*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, 1977, p.17.

¹⁰⁰ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Uninvited Guest*, p.43.

They looked very much alike, too, with their mother's sandy blond hair and bright blue eyes, and their own personal freckles. People who didn't know them often thought they were twins. Lately, with Mart letting his short hair grow out, the resemblance was even closer, much to Mart's dismay. Deep down he was one of Trixie's staunchest supporters, but he did enjoy needling her. One of the ways Trixie got back at him was to tease him about being her almost-twin.¹⁰¹

Unfortunately, this physical similarity to Mart is a negative in Trixie's mind. In #25 *The Sasquatch Mystery*, the Bob-Whites go camping with Hallie and her brothers, in Idaho. Trixie compares herself to her cousin, the image of her physical similarity to Mart is a sour reminder that she is 'not pretty enough':

At thirteen, Hallie Belden was beautiful. Her bones were long and fragile-looking. Her braided, smooth hair was as dark as Brian's. She had eyes the color of ripe blackberries and brows that would never need tweezers. Trixie had no trouble imagining Hallie as a rajah's daughter in floating silks, but there she sat – in well-worn blue jeans, old plaid shirt, and scuffed boots. Trixie doubted that she would ever be able to overcome a niggly-naggle of jealousy. She herself weighed a few more pounds than any of the other girls, and she wasn't as tall. It was hard to think of herself as pretty, when each time she faced Mart she saw herself - sandy curls, round blue eyes, and freckles. Mart was many things, but he wasn't *pretty*!¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Queen's Necklace*, p.16.

¹⁰² Kenny, K. *The Sasquatch Mystery*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing, 1979, pp.17-18.

As well as having the honour of featuring the identification bracelet that turned out to be a red herring, *The Happy Valley Mystery* reinforces femininity in a number of ways. In a way almost reminiscent of wild animals in a documentary, Honey, Di and Trixie perform their ‘natural’ interest in the opposite sex, preening to attract prospective males/mates. When the Bob-Whites attend a basketball game at which their new friend Ned Schulz is playing, the girls all notice what a fine specimen he is – in particular, Honey and Di, the feminine girls, admire his good looks, while Trixie, as the tomboy, admires his physicality and basketball skills:

It wasn’t hard to tell which of the players was Ned Schulz. He was the tallest, the darkest, and the handsomest. Automatically Honey smoothed back her long hair, and Diana batted her curly lashes for a better look at him.

Trixie, though, followed Ned’s quick, perfectly timed progress around the floor, and, as the ball left his hands, arched into the air, and ripped through the basket, she whistled in quick admiration.¹⁰³

Other mysteries also feature Trixie’s admiring gaze on boys; she thinks Jim “looked handsome in his smart red Bob-White jacket” in *The Mystery of the Headless Horseman*,¹⁰⁴ and in *The Mystery of the Ghostly Galleon*, when the boys arrive at the table for dinner, “Secretly [Trixie] thought all of them looked handsome in their dark trousers and white shirts”.¹⁰⁵ These instances of attraction emphasise the heteronormative positioning of the texts.

¹⁰³ Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery* (RT), p.85.

¹⁰⁴ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Headless Horseman*, p.114.

¹⁰⁵ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Ghostly Galleon*, p.91, my parentheses.

Observing the way boys pay attention to Honey and Di, Trixie compares herself to her friends and reflects on her tomboyishness, wishing she was more of a ‘girl’, like her friends:

Boys milled around Honey and Diana, trying to get their attention and book them for dances later. Trixie, hair tousled and face flushed, stayed close to Brian and Mart and Jim. As one of the Rivervale fans slapped her on the back, with a quick word of praise for her basket shots, she sent a wistful glance toward Diana and Honey. They both looked so pretty and appealing.

*Sometimes, she said to herself, I wish I could remember to be a girl instead of a tomboy. Especially when there'll be dancing.*¹⁰⁶

At the dance, the heterosexual binary sees boys and girls pairing up; boys are attracted to girls, and girls to boys:

When Trixie looked around, she discovered that Honey had gone off with a group of boys, that Diana was in a corner of the gym surrounded by another half dozen, and that Jim and Brian and Mart were in the midst of a crowd of some of the prettiest girls she had ever seen.¹⁰⁷

Trixie becomes jealous of the attention shown to Jim by another girl, named Dot; she tries to pretend, outwardly and to herself, that she is not upset about Jim and Dot. She tries to divert her feelings by paying attention to Ned instead. In her mind, Trixie appraises her competition: “The blond girl, Dot, was beautiful. *No wonder*

¹⁰⁶ Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery* (RT), p.89.

¹⁰⁷ Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery* (RT), p.92.

Jim thinks she's wonderful. No wonder he can't seem to see anyone else, Trixie thought".¹⁰⁸ But Jim *does* return to Trixie's side and asks her to dance. Later on, when Trixie talks to Jim about Dot, they both agree that Dot is "glamorous". However, Jim tells Trixie:

‘The *other* kind of girl,’ Jim went on, ‘didn’t dress up just to impress me or any other boy. She never does. She’s genuine and so comfortable to be around. She’s my choice of the two. Right now her sandy curls need combing, and she sure could use some lipstick!’¹⁰⁹

While it's nice that Jim reassures Trixie that he values and chooses her, he tells her she needs to comb her hair and she could use some lipstick. The genuine Trixie is good, but the brushed and painted (dressed and adorned for gender performance) Trixie is better.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger wrote about woman and the gaze, looking at the representation of woman throughout the history of art; he may as well have been writing about Trixie Belden in *The Happy Valley Mystery*:

From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.

And so she comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman.

¹⁰⁸ Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery* (RT), p.98.

¹⁰⁹ Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery* (RT), p.100.

She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another.¹¹⁰

Trixie continues to observe how her girl friends act around boys. She tells herself: *“I can learn a lot about how to act with boys just by watching Di*, Trixie thought. *It comes naturally to her, though”*.¹¹¹ The implication here and throughout the series is that for Trixie (and perhaps some of her readers), knowing how to act or perform around boys does not come naturally. It is something that Trixie feels compelled to learn to do effectively and correctly. Part of Trixie’s coming of age includes learning the ‘correct’ gendered behaviour, just as it was for Jo March and Laura Ingalls. In a moment that would make feminists cringe, Trixie learns how to ‘allow’ boys to be chivalrous:

Boys from Rivervale High crowded around Honey, Diana, and Trixie, helping them adjust their skates. At first, Trixie waved them off, but when she saw Honey and Diana accepting help as though they had never seen a skate before, she changed her own tactics. I’ve got to quit being such a tomboy, she thought and smiled quickly in gratitude as Ned laced her skates for her...¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Berger, J. *Ways of Seeing*, p.46.

¹¹¹ Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery* (RT), p.102.

¹¹² Kenny, K. *The Happy Valley Mystery* (RT), p.116.

Trixie really struggles with feelings of ambivalence regarding femininity. She is not comfortable with femininity, yet she is curious and compelled to explore it. In *The Mystery of the Emeralds*, while digging around in the attic, Trixie puts on an old bonnet.

She brushed the dust from the mirror over the chest and surveyed herself critically. She was surprised to find the image rather pleasing. Her face, outlined by the soft lines of the bonnet, took on an unaccustomed sweetness, and Trixie resolved to try harder to curb her tomboyish impulses.¹¹³

In the Trixie Belden series, the figure of the tomboy never reaches the point of comfortable femininity as she does in the March texts and the Little House series. Through Trixie we see the tomboy construct in a constant state of desiring, learning and practicing femininity. Trixie is in a constant state of *becoming* which is ideologically acceptable, as her reflections on gender are undoubtedly made within the context of the heteronormative system of gender – she clearly desires to fit into this system, to be attractive in a feminine way and to attract male attention. This portrayal of the tomboy reflects Sutherland's politics of assent and advocacy, demonstrating the authors' and editors' assumptions regarding 'normality' and the desire to responsibly present the normal process of growing up as a female in a text aimed at a young audience. Trixie is portrayed as aspiring to perform gender correctly, and is therefore an ideologically acceptable model for the impressionable sponge.

¹¹³ Kenny, K. *The Mystery of the Emeralds*, p.20.

The Reissued Series

When the Trixie Belden series was cancelled in 1986, there was a protest led by the Society of Phantom Friends, a group of girls' series fans and collectors.¹¹⁴

Knight comments,

Golden Press publicity manager Melanie Donovan stated that 'little girls today are a little more sophisticated... and prefer pseudo-sexy teen novels.' This is incredibly ironic, considering all the edicts to 'downplay' the romance in the Trixie Belden series. If they had, instead, continued the romantic trend apparent in books 7 through 15, the series might have lasted longer! Shortly before cancellation, the company considered letting the characters age again, but the idea was evidently discarded. Had it been adopted, this change might also have prolonged Trixie's publication life.¹¹⁵

This demonstrates just how the idea of what is appropriate firstly influences what is included in children's books and secondly, shifts and varies over time. A large factor in the success and perceived viability of children's fiction revolves around this.

Following the success of the reappearance of the original Nancy Drew Mystery Stories in facsimile edition, the Trixie Belden series was reissued by

¹¹⁴ The Society of Phantom Friends still exists today. Their newsletter, called *The Whispered Watchword* is published ten times a year. Text from the inside cover of the newsletter reads "The Society was founded in 1985 by fans of Margaret Sutton's Judy Bolton series. Since then, the group has expanded its scope to cover all girls' fiction, both old and new. Its primary focus is on girls' series books." (Quoted from *The Whispered Watchword*, June/July 2005 Volume 05-05)

¹¹⁵ Knight, M.K. *Schoolgirl Shamuses*, p.42.

Random House, in 2003.¹¹⁶ While the Nancy Drew facsimile editions are primarily targeted at a nostalgic adult audience, the reissued Trixie Belden books are aimed at children. The new Trixie Belden books, picture cover hardbacks, are cheaper than the dust-jacketed Nancy Drew facsimile editions (for example, RRP for the facsimile *The Secret of the Old Clock* is US\$17.95; RRP for the reissued *The Secret of the Mansion* is US\$6.99).¹¹⁷ There is a website for the new Trixie Belden series under the “kids” category on the Random House site,¹¹⁸ where the Trixie Belden fan club has been resurrected.¹¹⁹ Of course, there would be a certain proportion of nostalgic adult readers of the reissued books (yours truly included), but all signs indicate that Random House is keen to market the series to new, young readers. As declared on the web site, “Trixie is back to make fans of a new generation!”

The reissued series is marketed as a “period” series. As the blurb on the back cover of the books reads,

Who is Trixie Belden? Trixie first appeared over fifty years ago in *The Secret of the Mansion*, which was followed by thirty-eight other adventures

¹¹⁶ *The Secret of the Mansion* and *The Red Trailer Mystery* were both released in June 2003, closely followed by *The Gatehouse Mystery* in July 2003 and *The Mysterious Visitor* in August 2003 – in effect, these served as the “breeder” volumes of the reissued series. Random House was committed to publishing the first six books initially (#5 and #6 were published in March and May 2004 respectively); the publication of future volumes depended on sales. Obviously the reception has been good, as the reissued series is now up to #13 *The Mystery on Cobbett’s Island*, published in July 2005.

¹¹⁷ Prices obtained online from Applewood Books (*The Secret of the Old Clock*) http://www.applewoodbooks.com/catalog/product_info.php/authors_id/1135/products_id/5, accessed 4 August 2005 and Random House (*The Secret of the Mansion*), <http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/trixiebelden/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780375824128>, accessed 4 August 2005.

¹¹⁸ <http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/trixiebelden/>, accessed 18 November 2004. The web address for Random House “kids” appears on the back cover of the issued books.

¹¹⁹ The Random House Trixie Belden fan club may be found online at <http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/trixiebelden/fanclub.html>, accessed 18 November 2004. The original Trixie Belden fan club ran from 1979-1980. See Knight, M.K. pp.460-465 for further information.

as generation after generation of readers grew up with mystery-loving Trixie and her friends.

Although the publisher has chosen all-new illustrations for the covers,¹²⁰ the original internal illustrations have been included. Text at the beginning of the colophon page of the reissued *The Mysterious Code* reads

This is a reissue edition of a book that was originally published in 1961.

While some words have been changed to regularize spelling within the book and between books in the series, the text has not been updated to reflect current attitudes and beliefs.¹²¹

This statement (just like the Publisher's Note at the beginning of the Nancy Drew facsimile editions) serves as a disclaimer, protecting the publishers from criticism for any so-called propounding of outdated values. Of course, the Trixie Belden series does not contain the extensive racial and class stereotyping that the original Nancy Drew series did. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, *the gaze* of Trixie directs the reader to a heteronormative, binary view of gender, and the Trixie Belden series clearly presents a heteronormative world and ideologically acceptable messages for presentation to a young sponge audience, including the value of hard

¹²⁰ As revealed in "Solving the Mystery of the Missing Detective: Trixie Belden Returns to Print" by Judith Sears, at Trixie Belden Online, http://barbln.org/trixie/tb_article.htm, accessed 8 November 2004 (originally published in *The Whispered Watchword*, June/July 2003), editor Jennifer Dussling "considered attempting to use some of the original cover art, but decided against that for several reasons. For one thing, she found that the cover art was not as consistently strong as she would have liked. Additionally, Trixie's inconsistent publishing history was a hurdle. No single cover art style was used for all 39 volumes. In the end, Dussling decided that new cover art designed to appeal to both collectors and a new generation of readers, would be the best choice".

¹²¹ All of the reissued books include the same message, with the "originally published" year changed accordingly.

work, cooperation and perseverance, all of which reflect a combination of the politics of assent and advocacy.

As a supporting character, George Fayne is of course never as developed as Trixie Belden, who is the protagonist in her own series. We never really get to know George Fayne in the way that we do Trixie Belden; there are no moments of introspection for George; only responses to plot developments. Because Trixie Belden is a tomboy in ‘books in series’ (at least for the first sixteen books), her path towards femininity and womanhood is laid out (even though, with the freezing of her age, she never reaches it). There is no need to question her sexuality because her gaze upon herself, upon other females and upon males all point towards heterosexual desire and a reality based on the male/female and masculine/feminine binaries. All of this makes Trixie Belden a less problematic series to reissue than Nancy Drew, and Trixie a less urgent candidate for revision than the original “too blunt and boyish” George.

Despite any of my negative criticisms of the Trixie Belden series, it remains one of my all-time favorites that I return to again and again, just for sheer *non-scholarly* pleasure. The subjects of Trixie Belden’s introspection, namely, her ambivalence towards femininity, her constant comparative gaze upon herself and upon others, her intense desire for approval, her awareness of and attempts to learn and perform the correct gendered behaviour, all reinforce a particular world, based on a masculine/feminine binary driven by an assumed heteronormativity. I have

suggested that this is a combination of Sutherland's politics of advocacy and politics of assent at work, driven by both conscious and subconscious motivations to intentionally present only the ideologically acceptable in a children's series, and also the underlying desire to present the world as it is – a text as a reflection of the 'normal'.

Trixie is a tomboy, and at least for the first sixteen 'books in series' (and sporadically in the 'series books' that followed), her struggles with femininity and the pressures of growing up are very much in the vein of Jo March and Laura Ingalls. Like Jo and Laura, Trixie is learning correct gendered behaviour. The feminine girls featured throughout the series, Trixie's best friends Honey and Di, her cousin Hallie and others, all contribute to the development of Trixie's gendered identity and behaviour; through the act of observing how femininity should be performed, Trixie is learning how to control those natural tomboyish impulses. Trixie is adopting the practice of the gaze, and as a result performs self-criticism and self-reflection, with regards to her physical features, her appearance, her behaviour and her interactions with others. Her body is a significant part of this growing and ever-present self-awareness; the body is the ultimate expression of the self... "an important means of self-definition, a way to visibly announce who you are to the world".¹²²

¹²² Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. New York: Vintage, 1997, p.97.

In the following chapter, I explore the parameters within which arguably the most famous of all the tomboys in children's literature, Enid Blyton's George of the Famous Five series, is located. George's relationship with the feminine and passive Anne echoes the binary relationships depicted within the texts discussed in the preceding chapters. I will also examine the tomboy character of Bill in Blyton's Malory Towers series, arguing and demonstrating that Blyton's formulaic narratives and representations of gender possess a far greater sophistication and cultural value than tends to be acknowledged by critics and literary scholars.

Chapter Five

Tomboys George and Bill: Looking Beyond the Flawed Mythology of Enid Blyton

Enid Blyton is arguably the most well-known children's author included in this thesis. She ranks among the most prolific of authors, publishing over six hundred works;¹ in 1951 alone she reportedly published a remarkable total of thirty-seven titles.² Blyton created some of the best-remembered characters and series in children's fiction, including Noddy, The Magic Faraway Tree, The Secret Seven and Famous Five. Whenever I spoke about my research, Blyton's character of George from the Famous Five series was the tomboy most instantly recalled by adults, some of whom had not even read the Famous Five books as children. Despite Blyton's fame and prolificity, however, her work has become associated with a certain degree of infamy. Blyton's work has been heavily criticised for being of poor literary quality, in particular for having a limited, repetitive vocabulary³ and poorly developed, stereotypical characters.⁴ In addition, Blyton's books have been condemned for reflecting questionable values, and labelled as "racist, sexist and cosily middle-class".⁵ Sheila Ray has written about librarians' concern regarding

¹ Hunt, Peter. *Children's Literature* (Blackwell Guides to Literature). Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, p.36-37 and Ray, Sheila G. *The Blyton Phenomenon: The Controversy Surrounding the World's Most Successful Children's Writer*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1982, p.3.

² Ray, S.G. *The Blyton Phenomenon*, p.3.

³ Ray, S.G. *The Blyton Phenomenon*, p.99, and Dixon, Bob. *Catching Them Young: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction*. London: Pluto, 1977, p.68.

⁴ Ray, S.G. *The Blyton Phenomenon*, 99.

⁵ Auchmuty, Rosemary. *A World of Girls*. London: Women's Press, 1992, p.5.

the buying of Blyton books for their shelves⁶, and David Rudd has noted the omission of Blyton from certain critical studies and histories of children's literature.⁷

The negativity and controversy surrounding Blyton's work, especially with regards to their inappropriate values, would probably dismay the author were she still alive, for Blyton believed in children being innocent and impressionable (Sternheimer's "sponges"), and as a result took her role as a children's author very seriously, seeing her position as one of great influence and responsibility, made even more significant by her being a *popular* children's author with the potential to reach many children. In 1949, she wrote of her books and her aims for her writing:

...although there is always plenty of excitement, mystery and fun... I am not out only to tell stories... I am out to inculcate decent thinking, loyalty, honesty, kindness, and all the things that children *should* be taught.⁸

Furthermore, Blyton stated:

I do not write merely to entertain... My public do not possess matured minds – what is said to them in books they are apt to believe and follow, for they are credulous and immature. Therefore I am also a teacher and a guide (I hope) as well as an entertainer and bringer of pleasure...

⁶ See Ray's chapter "Enid Blyton and Librarians", pp.64-87 for a detailed exploration of this subject.

⁷ And in relation to this omission, Rudd comments that "over time, silence itself comes to look like a form of censorship", p.36. He does make the point, p.32 that Blyton was not always viewed negatively by the critics; she was at a certain point highly regarded in educational circles, writing for *Teacher's World* from 1922 to 1945, as well as editing and contributing to a number of other educational texts for teachers.

⁸ Stoney, Barbara. *Enid Blyton: A Bibliography*. Revised edition. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992, p.212. Cited in Hunt, P. *Children's Literature*, p.38.

Naturally, the morals or ethics are *intrinsic* to the story – and therein lies their true power.⁹

Of course, as I have been arguing and demonstrating throughout this thesis, values that are assumed be “decent thinking”, universally acceptable, exemplary, and therefore represented in children’s literature via subject, theme, plot and character inevitably shift and evolve over time. It would be easy to simply condemn the portrayal of gender in Blyton’s texts for being ‘sexist’, for example, and proclaim her work as unsuitable (definitely *not* “what should be [actively] taught” or “decent thinking”) for today’s impressionably absorbent young sponges, but I believe it is immensely important to regard children’s texts of the past, including Blyton’s work, as culturally and historically significant texts which can reveal a great deal about values, morals and assumptions, both of the past and of now.¹⁰ A face-value reading of Blyton’s texts may of course generate negative judgements based on our contemporary views, which appear incompatible with the values presented in the

⁹ Quoted in n.a. *Complete List of Books: Enid Blyton*. John Menzies, Edinburgh, 1950?, p.2. Cited by Dixon, B. *Catching Them Young: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction*, p.57.

¹⁰ It has been recently announced that Disney has acquired the rights to develop a Famous Five animated series. See Sanderson, David. “Famous Five to get a Disney makeover” in *The Times Online*, 4 December 2006. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-2486029.html>, accessed 20 December 2006. Already, Disney and its production partner Chorion (who own the rights to the novels) have declared that some of the old-fashioned language of the books will not be included in the series - we can probably assume that among the purged words will be “gay” and “queer”. Joanne Oatts writes that even the names of the children are to be modernised: “Cole, Dylan, Jo and Allie are to replace the originals Julian, Dick, Anne and George” in “Famous Five get the Disney treatment” in *Digital Spy*, 5 December 2006. <http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/article/ds40380.html>, accessed 20 December 2006. It remains to be seen how the new series does manage to “remain faithful to the spirit” of Blyton’s stories, as Disney assures is its aim. In this thesis, I have discussed the revision of a number of children’s texts. Part of me is strongly against the revision of texts, because I think that we lose an important part of cultural and social history through the revision of literature. Of course animation is a very different medium to books, but by replacing old values with today’s values, or even old-fashioned names with more contemporary names, we no longer read the text, but an adulterated and transformed version. In many cases, we no longer read the words written by the author, but by the editor(s).

texts. Perry Nodelman urges us to read children's texts of the past with an awareness of their *absences*:

...the ideas or assumptions it takes for granted and therefore does not actually assert... Our awareness of absences allows both children and adults to enjoy stories written in different times without assuming that sexist or racist or just plain old-fashioned values in the stories are ones we should share".¹¹

In this chapter, I will show that the portrayal of the tomboy and gender in Blyton's work reflects an ambivalence that is far more complex than the labels of "old-fashioned values" and "sexist" suggest. I will examine the representation of two of Blyton's tomboy characters, George of the Famous Five series, and Bill of the Malory Towers school series, against the backdrop of the literary and the values criticisms (specifically the charge of *sexism*) in her work. David Rudd has exposed a number of "expert" opinions on Blyton's work as contradictory and based on blatant misreadings (in some cases, it even appears, *non-readings*!) in great detail,¹² pointing out that it is precisely such literary discourse that has shaped the "commonly accepted construction of Blyton as monosyllabic, threadbare and

¹¹ Nodelman, Perry. *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*. New York: Longman, 1991, p.93. Reading texts which present such "old-fashioned values" can be a productive and dynamic exercise, as Nodelman suggests: "Rather than allowing ourselves to become immersed in a text to the point of accepting its description of reality as the only truly one, we can define its values and so arrive at a better understanding of our own. In other words, instead of going along with the values a text implies, we can read *against* it", p.94.

¹² Refer to Rudd's chapter entitled "The Pied Piper among the Critics", in *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature*. Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp.45-62. I will discuss a number of examples of critics' feedback, but will not attempt to duplicate the excellent work already done by Rudd in his chapter.

pedestrian”.¹³ I will focus on how the tomboys *function* within the texts, which I recognise as being *formulaic* works (in this case, two very specific genres, the adventure story and the school story). By definition, formula and repetition go hand in hand – after all, in the very first instance, a series is a result of the repetition of some sort of formula; but I do not believe that either necessarily creates flawed or inferior fiction. There is variation and innovation within Blyton’s formulae; her series should not be simply dismissed because there are identifiable patterns in her narratives and her characters fulfil particular functions within them. In addition to examining two very memorable tomboy characters and the texts in which they appear, my secondary aim for this chapter is to study and present the Blyton texts as deliberately constructed, highly successful formulaic works, with variation, sophistication and *value* that is often overlooked because of the preoccupation with their so-called political incorrectness and poor literary quality, which has developed into a pervasive but ultimately flawed mythology.

Sexist Blyton?

In this section, I will discuss the perceived sexism in Blyton’s work predominantly in relation to the representation of the tomboy and gender in the Famous Five series. The Malory Towers series presents an almost all-female community in the girls’ boarding school, and the girls do not interact with boys on a regular basis; I will discuss Bill and the Malory Towers series later in this chapter when I address the formulaic aspects of Blyton’s work.

¹³ Rudd, David. *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature*, pp.53-54.

David Rudd suggests that the Famous Five books “are particularly effective in dramatizing power relationships between the sexes”,¹⁴ and I agree. Although Blyton’s characters do reflect certain attitudes which may now be identified as sexist, the boys are *not* simply portrayed as always in charge and superior, nor are the girls simply subservient or inferior. Sheila Ray notes that Blyton has been attacked by critics for sexism in her adventure series, where “girls usually take a supportive part while the boys have the really exciting adventures, and mothers are usually seen in a very stereotyped domestic role, dispensing food and comfort at appropriate levels”.^{15 16} Although there are examples throughout the series of the boys having “the really exciting adventures” (in *Five Go Off to Camp*, Julian, Dick and Jock go to watch for “spook-trains” leaving George and Anne behind; in *Five on a Hike Together*, Julian and Dick dive into the lake to retrieve the treasure, leaving Anne and George waiting on the raft, even though the early books establish George as the best swimmer and diver in the group), this summation of the portrayal of gender only captures *part* of the way gender is represented in Blyton’s adventure series. In the Famous Five series, gender roles are not only questioned and challenged (most obviously) through the tomboy George, they are sometimes even subverted.

¹⁴ Rudd, D. *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature*, p.112.

¹⁵ Ray, S.G. *The Blyton Phenomenon*, pp.68-69.

¹⁶ A prime example of this in popular children’s fiction is Laura Hardy, mother of the Hardy Boys, who is “seldom seen, and, when she is, mostly worries about her sons or packs them lunches”, Kismaric, Carole and Marvin Heiferman. *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998, p.32.

On the surface, the division of labour in the Famous Five series seems to demonstrate straightforward sexism in action. Whether in a caravan, campsite, chalet or cave, the cooking, serving and cleaning up are done almost exclusively by the girls, sometimes directed by either of the boys. Sandwich-making, at any rate, appears to be a strictly female-only activity. In *Five Go to Billycock Hill*, having found out that little Benny is missing, Dick instructs Anne to ““make some sandwiches very quickly””, and while George and Anne make sandwiches, the boys make the plans to search for Benny.¹⁷ In *Five Get into a Fix*, Julian mobilises the girls: firstly, when they arrive at the mountain chalet: ““What about you and George seeing what blankets and things are in those cupboards, and making up some beds for tonight””,¹⁸ and later, to prepare food to take along on an expedition: ““George, you make sandwiches with Anne, will you? And put in some bars of chocolate too, and some apples if there are any left””.¹⁹ In *Five on Finniston Farm*, the feminine/indoor and masculine/outdoor division (much like the division of internal/external labour in the Little House series) falls neatly into place after breakfast, with George and Anne staying inside to help Mrs. Philpot clear the table and do the dishes, while the boys venture out of the house to help milk the cows.²⁰

Anne is the antithesis of George – she is the happily domesticated female, who professes in multiple books to have a preference for holidays without

¹⁷ Blyton, E. *Five Go to Billycock Hill*. Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987, p.165.

¹⁸ Blyton, E. *Five Get into a Fix*. Leicester: Knight Books, 1970, p.69.

¹⁹ Blyton, E. *Five Get into a Fix*, p.136.

²⁰ Blyton, E. *Five on Finniston Farm*. Sevenoaks, Kent: Knight, 1978, pp.40-41.

adventures.²¹ Anne is content not being included in the activities of the boys, telling George: ““they don’t want us girls round them all the time. We couldn’t do the things they do””. George, of course, thinks very differently: ““I can do anything that Dick and Julian do... I can climb, and bike for miles, can walk as far as they can, I can swim, I can beat a whole lot of boys at most things””.²² When the series begins, Anne is distinguished within the adventuring group as the youngest and feminine girl who loves dolls and soft toys, is timid and cries easily, giving rise to George’s scorn. While George challenges and defies the expectations associated with her being a girl, Anne is usually cited as a subservient, passive character, and consequently touted as a “bad” example for impressionable girl sponges. In the early Five books, marked as the baby of the group, Anne is clearly the ‘weakest’ member of the group, with the least admirable traits – not only is she easily frightened and prone to crying, she also gives away secrets and is the least physically capable. I am not, however, convinced that these ‘weaknesses’ have been given to Anne primarily because of her gender; she is after all, the youngest of the group, and therefore her ‘babyishness’ and ‘weaknesses’ should at least partially be attributed to her being the youngest, not only her being a girl. But beyond this, Anne’s role evolves into the far more significant one of housekeeper, primarily responsible for planning and preparing the Five’s meals when they are on their own.²³

²¹ This contrasting attitude towards adventures is reminiscent of George and Bess’s contrasting attitudes towards mysteries, in the Nancy Drew series.

²² Blyton, E. *Five Go to Mystery Moor*. Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979, p.10.

²³ Food is a central part of the Famous Five series and indeed in many of Blyton’s series: the Famous Five have numerous picnics, ice-cream breaks on bicycling journeys, afternoon teas, lunches and suppers; the school stories feature tuck boxes, the sumptuous dinners on the first day back at school, and midnight feasts; farming stories have high teas; and the fairy stories such as *The Magic*

As the Five's housekeeper, Anne eagerly and capably creates and organises the "house", wherever the Five happen to be. George, of course, resents the expectation that she must work alongside Anne and contribute to the housekeeping because they are both girls. Anne's contentment with her domestic duties highlights the contrast between her and George, emphasizing George's tomboyishness and precisely what she is rebelling against and resentful of; no doubt George's discontent and sulky participation reflect the attitudes of *some* girls:

'I shall look after the food side for you,' she [Anne] said. 'But George must help with the preparing of the meals and the washing-up. See, George?'

George didn't see. She hated doing all the things that girls had to do, such as making beds and washing-up. She looked sulky.²⁴

In *Five Have a Mystery to Solve*, Anne surveys the cottage that the Five will be looking after, making plans for the housekeeping aspects of their stay:

Anne enjoyed herself thoroughly. This was the kind of problem she liked – fixing up this and that for the others! She found a little larder, facing north. It had a few tins in it, and a jug of milk, slightly sour. It also had two loaves of extremely stale bread, and a tin of rather hard cakes.

'Mrs Layman doesn't seem to be a very good housekeeper for herself and Wilfrid,' thought Anne, seriously. 'We'll have to go down to

Faraway Tree have "magical" culinary creations such as Toffee Shocks, Google Buns and Pop Biscuits. Rudd writes about "The Five and the 'F' word: pleasures of the text (the 'F' word being "Food")", *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature*, pp. 102-108.

²⁴ Blyton, E. *Five Go off to Camp*. Leicester: Brockhampton Press, 1974, p.361, my parentheses.

the village and put in a stock of decent food. I might get a small ham – the boys would like that. Goodness – this *is* going to be fun!’

Julian came to the door to see what she was doing. When he saw her happy, serious face, he chuckled. ‘Acting “mother” to us, as usual?’ he asked. ‘Deciding who’s going to sleep where, and which of us is to do the shopping, and which the washing-up? Dear old Anne – what would we do without you when we go off on our own?’

‘I love it,’ said Anne happily.²⁵

As the excerpt above shows, Anne actively embraces and enjoys the decision-making, problem-solving, planning and organisation that are part of being the housekeeper. Anne is not only happy in her role as housekeeper; she is in fact, *empowered* by her position. She is proud of the role she plays within the group, telling the others, “‘You’d never get your bunks made, or your meals cooked, or the caravans kept clean if it wasn’t for me!’”²⁶ When her mother (quite progressively) tells Anne that the others, including the boys, should help too, Anne replies: “‘They don’t know how to wash and dry a cup properly – and George never bothers about things like that. If I don’t make the bunks and wash the crockery, they would never be made or washed, I know that!’”²⁷ She is thoughtful and efficient within her “‘houses”; she regulates the Five’s eating, washing and sleeping (“‘although Julian thinks he’s in charge of us, *I* am really!’”²⁸), and takes the initiative to ensure their comfort: in *Five Run Away Together*, she collect sticks and stores them at the back

²⁵ Blyton, E. *Five Have a Mystery to Solve*. Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder & Stoughton, 1974, pp. 39-40.

²⁶ Blyton, E. *Five Go off in a Caravan*. Leicester: Knight Books, 1973, p.40.

²⁷ Blyton, E. *Five Go off in a Caravan*, p.26.

²⁸ Blyton, E. *Five Go off in a Caravan*, p.40.

of the cave, just in case they want to make a fire later. And although Julian and Dick are seen to delegate chores, Anne herself takes charge of the others, and they comply:

‘There are twelve [sausages],’ said Anne, giving Dick the bag. ‘Three each. None for Timmy! ...Julian, will you get me some water, please? There’s the pail, over there. I want to peel the potatoes. George, can you possibly open the peaches without cutting yourself like you did last time?’

‘Yes, Captain!’ said George...²⁹

But Anne’s assertive moments are not confined to the domestic arena. In *Five Have a Mystery to Solve*, Anne’s brothers (and the reader!) discover that their little sister is not always “a quiet little mouse”.³⁰ She gives Dick an unexpected tongue-lashing when he laughs and wobbles on his bicycle, making contact with her back wheel. Julian then witnesses Anne flinging a bucket of water at Wilfrid, who is being particularly rude and uncooperative:

He came just in time to see Anne drenching Wilfrid, and stared in the utmost amazement. *Anne* behaving like that? Anne looking really *fierce* – quiet, peaceful Anne! What in the world had happened?³¹

And later in the chapter named “Anne is a tiger!” Anne surprises everyone when she unleashes startling aggression, yelling at the top of her voice and urging Timmy to bite the villains who are trying to steal the Five’s boat, then throwing a stone at

²⁹ Blyton, E. *Five Go off in a Caravan*, p.32.

³⁰ Blyton, E. *Five Have a Mystery to Solve*, p.13.

³¹ Blyton, E. *Five Have a Mystery to Solve*, p.54.

the men as they row away, striking the boat and making them jump. Earlier in the mystery, Julian declares that “[a] mouse can’t suddenly turn into a tiger! Anyway, one tiger’s enough. George is the tiger of our family...”³² But Anne does turn into a tiger, although it appears that this is temporary and confined only to this particular mystery. *Five Have a Mystery to Solve* is the second-last book of the series, and in the next and final book, there is no mention or sign of Anne the tiger making her reappearance. Julian is correct when he says that “one tiger’s enough” – the group dynamic of contrasting members would be thrown off balance if there was indeed permanently more than one tiger to fly off the handle or create conflict. Still, it is most enjoyable to see Anne behaving with uncharacteristic fierceness! Anne being a tiger *works* because the narrator and the Five acknowledge the contrast between mouse and tiger, and the unusual nature of Anne’s behaviour. Julian and Dick’s surprise at Anne’s unexpected outbursts, and even Anne’s surprise at herself are all consistent with the group dynamic and the characterisations of the Five that have been built up over the course of the series.

Anne is not the only highly domesticated female regularly portrayed in the series. Back at Kirrin Cottage, Aunt Fanny (along with another female, Joan the cook) plays a “very stereotyped domestic role”, but I argue that Aunt Fanny’s role of chairperson at the dinner table and thoughtful packer of picnics is less a product of sexism than it is part of the dynamic of the children’s adventure story, where the children play the principal, heroic roles. Adults, both male and female are relegated

³² Blyton, E. *Five Have a Mystery to Solve*, p.13.

to secondary roles, where they fulfil very specific functions. Zohar Shavit describes the adventure story adults:

...during the adventure adults surrounding the children either hardly take part, disturb the children and almost prevent them from solving the mystery, or constitute the criminals against whom the children fight.³³

And as Ray suggests, “the children are seen wholly from the children’s viewpoint, the author identifying completely with them and with the child reader”.³⁴

Cadogan and Craig note that Blyton’s boy characters are “consistently ‘chivalrous’ in the most rigid way”,³⁵ and there are many examples of ‘chivalry’ throughout her series. In *Five on a Hike Together*, Julian, the eldest boy and leader of the group, insists that although he and Dick may sleep out in a barn, the girls *must* sleep in a farmhouse. George protests, of course, to which Julian tells her: ““You may look like a boy and behave like a boy, but you’re a girl all the same.

³³ Shavit, Zohar. *Poetics of Children's Literature*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press., 1986, p.97. In *Five on a Treasure Island*, for example, Uncle Quentin provides a number of obstacles to the Five – he takes away the box from the children who realise that if its contents are sold, the treasure map within will fall into the hands of the buyer. And even worse, Uncle Quentin is then convinced by the buyer of the box to sell Kirrin Island.

³⁴ Ray, S.G. *The Blyton Phenomenon*, p.163. The passage Ray refers to is from *Five on a Treasure Island*, p.98: “Julian thought she didn’t understand grown-ups very well. It wasn’t a bit of good fighting grown-ups. They could do exactly as they liked. If they wanted to take away George’s island and castle, they could!” And later, when Uncle Quentin asks why they didn’t tell him what was going on, “The four children stared at them and didn’t answer. They couldn’t very well say, ‘Well, firstly you wouldn’t have believed us. Secondly, you are bad-tempered and unjust and we are frightened of you. Thirdly, we didn’t trust you enough to do the right thing’”, p.162. And Ray adds: “Although Uncle Quentin’s character perhaps provides some reason for the children’s lack of confidence the fourth reason, that it would spoil the story, is of course not mentioned.”

³⁵ Cadogan, Mary, and Patricia Craig. *You're a Brick, Angela!: A New Look at Girls' Fiction from 1839 to 1975*. London: Gollancz, 1976, p.340.

And like it or not, girls have got to be taken care of...decent boys like looking after their girl cousins or their sisters... And oddly enough decent girls like it'''.³⁶

On a number of occasions throughout the series, Julian and Dick intervene to prevent George from getting into fights, even though George herself shows no hesitation in fighting. Overruling George's desire to be a boy and to be treated like one, Julian and Dick stop George from fighting because they believe that *boys should not fight girls*. Despite George's convincing performance of masculinity, *she is still a girl* and must be protected. In Chapter Two, I discussed a similar gender boundary that is not crossed, even in desperate circumstances – Ma physically prevents Laura from trying to defend Pa when his life is under threat by workers during a pay dispute. In *Five Run Away Together*, George slaps Edgar, who taunts her as she looks for her parents. When Edgar lifts his hand to slap her back, Julian stands in front of George, blocking Edgar:

‘You’re not fighting George,’ he said. ‘She’s a girl. If you want a fight, I’ll take you on.’

‘I won’t be a girl; I’m a boy!’ shouted George, trying to push Julian away. ‘I’ll fight Edgar, and I’ll beat him, you see if I don’t.’

But Julian kept her off. Edgar began to edge towards the doorway, but he found Dick there.³⁷

³⁶ Blyton, E. *Five on a Hike Together*. London: Knight, 1969, pp.34-35.

³⁷ Blyton, E. *Five Run Away Together*. Leicester: Knight Books, 1969, p.30. Julian and Dick also physically prevent George from fighting Richard in *Five Get into Trouble*, over a dispute over dog names (Richard thinks George is a boy) in *More Adventures of the Famous Five: Five Go off in a Caravan/ Five on Kirrin Island Again/ Five Go off to Camp/ Five Get into Trouble*. London: Treasure Press, 1988, pp.528-530, and from fighting Jo the gipsy girl (whom the Five initially mistake for a boy) in *Five Fall into Adventure*. London: Brockhampton Press, 1974, pp.21-22.

I will discuss girls and fighting further in the next chapter. Although Blyton does not allow George to transcend the gender boundary where fighting is concerned, she explores, ‘plays’ with and challenges expectations of gendered roles and behaviour throughout the series in a number of different ways. In *Five Go Down to the Sea*, for example, when Mrs. Penruthlan tells Anne the boys needn’t help pod the peas, George is immediately put out, but as it turns out, the boys *want* to help:

‘I like that!’ said George indignantly. ‘How unfair! Why shouldn’t they, just because they’re boys?’

‘Don’t fly off the handle, George,’ grinned Dick. ‘We’re going to help, don’t worry. We like podding peas too! You’re not going to have all the treats!’³⁸

And so, with the (non-)issue of gender inequality settled, the girls and the boys all settle to pod the peas together.

In *Five Have Plenty of Fun*, Uncle Quentin is disgusted that his American colleague Elbur would consider giving away scientific secrets to save his daughter Berta if she were kidnapped, saying to his wife:

‘Pah! What’s he made of? Traitor to us all! How can he even *think* of giving away secrets for the sake of a silly girl?’

‘Quentin, she’s his only child and he adores her,’ said Aunt Fanny.

‘I should feel the same way about George.’

³⁸ Blyton, E. *Five Go Down to the Sea*. Leicester: Knight, 1971, p.48.

‘Women are always soft and silly,’ said her husband, in a tone of great disgust. ‘It’s a good thing *you* don’t know any secrets – you’d give them away to the milkman!’

This was so ridiculous that the children laughed.³⁹

Uncle Quentin’s outrage *is* ridiculous, and his suggestion that Aunt Fanny would give secrets away to the milkman is preposterous. Although he argues that women are soft and silly, he is the one behaving in a silly and irrational manner. Indeed, portrayed as the bad-tempered, absent-minded scientist who lives in a world of his own, Quentin is arguably the “silliest” member of the family. In *Five on Kirrin Island Again*, for example, he repeatedly forgets to eat the soup his wife has made for him, and then finally eats it after his wife has told him to throw it out because it will have gone bad (and it *has* gone bad by the time he eats it!). Masculinity is hardly valorised in the Famous Five series – Blyton demonstrates this earlier in the series in *Five Have a Wonderful Time*, where the children meet Alfredo the fire-eater, “a great big fellow” who has a “lion-like mane of tawny hair” and walks with “enormous strides”.⁴⁰ Dick is impressed by the fierce appearance of the fire-eater, and upon seeing his wife comments ““What a tiny wife he has! I bet he makes her run around him, and wait on him hand and foot””.⁴¹ But Dick’s assumption is proved wrong, for Alfredo himself does many of the chores, including cooking breakfast and hanging up the washing: “It seemed a most unsuitable thing for a fire-

³⁹ Blyton, E. *Five Have Plenty of Fun*. Leicester: Knight Books, 1971, p.27.

⁴⁰ Blyton, E. *Five Have a Wonderful Time*, p.41.

⁴¹ Blyton, E. *Five Have a Wonderful Time*, p.41

eater to do, but Alfredo didn't seem to mind"⁴². Mrs. Alfredo is certainly no subservient wife, and she shows no hesitation in reprimanding her husband in front of the children when he drops her best blouse on the ground, chasing him with a saucepan in her hand when he burns breakfast, and giving him "a violent nudge" as well as scolding him for being unfriendly towards the children.⁴³

In *Five on Kirrin Island Again*, George is furious to learn that her father has built a tower on Kirrin Island as part of his research, and is living on the island while he conducts his experiments. But when she sees how upset she is making her mother, George feels ashamed of herself. She decides to stop making a fuss and to support her father's project. When Julian praises her for this, he says:

'Good old George! She's actually learned, not only to give in, but to give in gracefully! George, you're more like a boy than ever when you act like that!'

George glowed. She liked Julian to say she was like a boy. She didn't want to be petty and catty and bear malice as so many girls did.⁴⁴

George and Julian may associate "giving in gracefully" with being a boy, but significantly, Blyton does not end this passage there. She has Anne speak up indignantly in response to Julian's praise of George, refuting the idea: "It isn't *only* boys that can learn to give in decently... Heaps of girls do. Well, I jolly well hope I

⁴² Blyton, E. *Five Have a Wonderful Time*, pp.48-50.

⁴³ Blyton, E. *Five Have a Wonderful Time*, pp.82-83.

⁴⁴ Blyton, E. *Five on Kirrin Island Again*. Leicester: Knight, 1967, p.23.

do myself!’”⁴⁵ Blyton herself said that she aimed to “inculcate decent thinking” in her readers, who were boys and girls: in this example, it is not only boys who give in decently, but, as Anne argues, boys *and* girls. The evidence of this is not only in Anne’s words, but in George, who is after all a girl, a girl who has, on this occasion, given in decently.

Throughout the series, when George has shown great courage, she is praised for being “as good as a boy any day”, by Julian, Dick, her father and other males. This, to George, is highly coveted praise. But when she behaves poorly – when she is petulant, sulky and uncooperative, the boys tell her she is behaving like a girl. In *Five Go off to Camp*, Julian, Dick and their new friend Jock make plans to go and watch for “spook-trains” at the old abandoned railway at night. Because Anne is too frightened to go, the boys (predominantly Julian) force George, as the only other girl, to remain behind at the campsite with Anne. George, not surprisingly, is very angry at being left out by the boys. She tells Anne, ““If you weren’t such a little coward, too afraid to go with us, I’d have been able to go too””. Julian responds to this by telling George: ““You’re behaving like a girl, for all you think you’re as good as a boy! Saying catty things like that! I’m astounded at you””.⁴⁶ The fact is, during this episode, George has every right to be frustrated with Anne. Of course, Anne does not physically forbid George to take part in the adventure, but it is *because* of Anne that Julian tells George she is not allowed to be part of the adventure. I always felt that Julian’s calling George “catty” was unjustified, because

⁴⁵ Blyton, E. *Five on Kirrin Island Again*, p.23.

⁴⁶ Blyton, E. *Five Go off to Camp*, p.438.

Anne was “a little coward” in this situation. In the world of Blyton, however, cowardice is one of the worst and most undesirable character blemishes one can have⁴⁷.

Although George is told that she is behaving like a girl when she is being particularly difficult, we never see Anne behaving in a similar way; yet, Anne is supposed to be the real “girly” girl of the group – in other words, it is clearly not true that sulky, spoilt George is behaving “just like a girl”. I tend to think that the boys’ calling George a girl is part of their strategy for getting George to cooperate, using the most compelling way to stop her being difficult; I do not see it as a manifestation of “sexist Blyton”.

Literary Quality, Repetition, Formula

A significant proportion of the criticisms of the quality of Blyton’s works are derived from their formulaic nature. As I have already suggested, formulaic texts are built on repetition. Blyton uses a number of different forms of repetition in her work. She clearly has ‘favourite’ names for characters, for example. In *Who’s*

⁴⁷ In *Five Get into Trouble*, Julian scornfully tells Richard Kent: “Cowardice is just thinking of your own miserable skin instead of somebody else’s. Why, even Anne is more worried about *us* than she is about herself – and that makes her brave. She couldn’t be a coward if she tried”, p.610. There are a number of “lessons” taught in Blyton stories about cowardice: For example, *Those Dreadful Children* (1949) John tells Pat, who has lied to Miss Johnson when his ball broke her window: “You don’t dare to own up when you’ve done wrong. That’s much more cowardly than not daring to jump a stream that’s too wide. *You’re* not brave, Pat. You can climb a tree and jump a stream – but you can’t own up to anything, Coward! I’m ashamed of having you for a friend”, p.95. In her collection of short stories called *Happy Adventure Tales* (1971) the story “Isn’t He a Coward” also preaches a similar message. Harry is teased and taunted by the other boys, called “cowardy-custard” because he will not climb to the top of the school wall and jump down, or jump into the river. But Harry goes to retrieve a little girl’s doll that has been thrown into the grounds of a man who keeps fierce dogs, and gains everyone’s respect – and the happy ending: everyone now knows Harry is not a coward, pp.64-73.

Who in Enid Blyton (1997), Eva Rice observes that Blyton's school stories feature a number of older girls named Pamela⁴⁸ and that she "had a great fondness for the name Winnie, calling no fewer than four of the girls in her school stories by this name".⁴⁹ The repetition extends to adjectives; Sheila Ray lists a number of specific words which Blyton uses repeatedly in her work: "lovely, nice, dear, little, cosy, peculiar, horrid, dreadful".⁵⁰ Alex I. Jones identifies the three adjectives that occur most often in Blyton's work: "little", "big" and "good". Jones suggests that "An author's use of a habitual repertoire of adjectives draws limits around the author's creative world, telling the reader what are the important qualities in that world".⁵¹ The simplicity of Blyton's adjectives reflects her intention to have a positive influence on her readers through the portrayal of unambiguous values/morals. Shavit discusses the interesting example of Roald Dahl's *Danny Champion of the World*, originally written for an adult audience and then rewritten for children:

Dahl could not afford to leave the ambiguous values and characterizations present in the adult version' such a presentation would be inconceivable in terms of the children's system, as children are supposed to understand only unequivocal values. Hence, the text for children offers a clear opposition

⁴⁸ Rice, Eva. *Who's Who in Enid Blyton: From Amelia Jane to Big Ears*. Revised ed. London: Orion, 2003, p.176

⁴⁹ Rice, E. *Who's Who in Enid Blyton*, p.150.

⁵⁰ Ray, S.G. *The Blyton Phenomenon*, p.202.

⁵¹ Jones, Alex, I. "Enid Blyton: The Sources of Creativity." *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature* 2, no. 2, 1991, p.66. Jones argues that Blyton's *The Twins at St. Clare's* "is about valuation; valuation of the character by itself and by others". The word "good" occurs frequently, not only by itself but also in terms of polar pairs of adjectives: "good/bad, old/new, silly/sensible, awful/nice, generous/mean, glad/sorry, hot/cold, proud/humble, stupid/clever" ...Jones writes, "[w]hat emerges from this choice of vocabulary is that *The Twins at St. Clare's* is more than anything else about evaluation: the important preconditions that the book imposes are evaluative preconditions, and of course the book is about the acculturation of Pat and Isabel to the values of those who are older, both in age and experience to themselves", p.66. Blyton's works use a great deal of oppositional relationships. "Bad" and "good" are shown, so that a lesson may be learned, not to do the "bad", but to follow the "good".

between ‘bad’ and ‘good’, and the characterization is of a black-and-white nature.⁵²

Bob Dixon makes harsh criticisms of Blyton’s language, calling it “colourless, dead and totally undemanding”.⁵³ Dixon mocks Blyton’s repetitive use of simile in her Famous Five series, saying, “I thought ‘the sea shone as blue as cornflowers’ in *Five Fall into Adventure* was a welcome thought... but, thirteen years and twelve books in the series later, it was still shining ‘as blue as cornflowers’”.⁵⁴ Rudd, however argues, very effectively I think, that critics who judge Blyton’s work as literary texts do so fallaciously; Rudd suggests that Blyton’s works follow the oral tradition of story-telling, rather than the literary; her language use is therefore “deliberately transparent... so that the story ‘goes without saying’, which is precisely why figurative language is avoided, and a variety of stock phrases are repeatedly used. Blyton’s sea is thus “blue as cornflowers”, just as Homer’s sea is “wine-red”.⁵⁵

Blyton has been criticised because the personalities of many of her characters remain fixed throughout each book and whole series.⁵⁶ George is one such character – she is just as thrilled to be mistaken for a boy in the last Famous

⁵² Shavit, Zohar. *Poetics of Children's Literature*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986, p.59.

⁵³ Dixon, B. *Catching Them Young: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction*, p.68. Dixon lists some of Blyton’s names as examples of her alleged lack of imagination: “Appletree Farm, Buttercup Farm, Redroofs, Sunny Stories, Chirpy and Twitters (sparrows), Prickles (a hedgehog) and Bobtail (a rabbit)”.

⁵⁴ Dixon, B. *Catching Them Young: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction*, p.68.

⁵⁵ Rudd, D. *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature*, pp.160-161.

⁵⁶ Auchmuty, R. *A World of Girls*, p.99.

Five book as she is in the very first. Bob Dixon, for example, writes “‘The Five’ never change, in any of the stories in which they appear, in any respect worth considering”⁵⁷ Such criticisms, based on the assumption that children’s texts must depict positive development and change and in that sense be obviously educational, miss the point completely; the Famous Five is an adventure series in which plot and action are the main focus, not the personal growth of its protagonists. Perry Nodelman correctly points out that:

We assume that everything in children’s lives ought to be educational...

The conviction that children should always be learning moves the significance of childhood from the immediate experience of living to the future consequences of that experience... An attitude of this sort leads to an evaluation of books in which the main consideration is what they might teach and how they might affect a young reader’s future. Instead of praising a funny book because it is funny, we may say that it is good because it will help children develop a sense of humour.⁵⁸

What literary critics such as Dixon fail to realise when they make their criticisms is that children’s fiction need not all be stories of development. In their respective series, George and Bill do experience a certain degree of personal growth; in *Five on a Treasure Island*, George learns to get along with her cousins, and comes to appreciate the pleasures of friendship and *sharing*. She learns about loyalty when her cousins stand by her instead of going home, in *Five Run Away Together*. Bill of Malory Towers learns not to be so obsessed with her horse and to make room in her

⁵⁷ Dixon, B. *Catching Them Young: Political Ideas in Children’s Fiction*, p.65.

⁵⁸ Nodelman, P. *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, p.33.

life for other pleasures and interests. But their identities are, of course, based on their being *and remaining* tomboys.

In *Narratology*, Mieke Bal discusses what she calls a “problem” of literary criticism – the tendency to divide characters into the opposing categories of “round” and “flat”:

Round characters are like ‘complex’ persons, who undergo a change in the course of the story, and remain capable of surprising the reader. *Flat characters* are stable, stereotypical characters that exhibit/contain nothing surprising...Entire genres, such as fairy tales, detective fiction, and pulp fiction, thus remain excluded from observation because all their characters are ‘flat’ ...⁵⁹

In addition to repetition, Bal names three other “principles which work together to construct the image of a character”, namely: the *accumulation* of characteristics, or data about a character, *relations with others* (which she divides into similarities and contrasts) and *transformations* (or changes) in a character.⁶⁰ All of these principles are clearly at work in Blyton’s characterisations. As I have argued previously using the example of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories’ George and Bess, the repetitive use of adjectives and descriptions which become associated with particular characters is very much a part of characterisation in formula fiction (and, as Rudd would argue, part of the oral tradition). This is also an important part

⁵⁹ Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985, p.81.

⁶⁰ Bal, M. *Narratology*, pp.85-86.

of establishing the *contrasting* members of the adventuring group, as explained in the Appendix “Adventure and Mystery Series Group Dynamics”. Blyton’s repeated use of certain adjectives and verbs in relation to particular characters over the course of her series forms part of their characterisation. Bal discusses the importance of repetition in the construction of character:

When a character appears for the first time, we do not yet know very much about it. The qualities that are implied in that first presentation are not all ‘grasped’ by the reader. In the course of the narrative the relevant characteristics are repeated to often – in a different form, however – that they emerge more and more clearly.⁶¹

Through *repetition* and *accumulation*, we come to know (and as part of the recognition and pleasure of the formula, come to *expect*) from reading different Famous Five books that George is the girl with short, dark curly hair who often looks “sulky” or “mutinous”, while her cousin Julian is a tall, strong “trustworthy” boy who always speaks in a “clear and steady” voice. A significant part of George’s characterisation is achieved through the portrayal of her *relations with others* – how different she is to Anne, their responses to things and their interactions with one another; her disagreements with, and respect for Julian; her absolute love and devotion to Timmy; independence, self-reliance and her refusal (more so in the earlier books) to rely on others. Although George does not experience significant *transformation* throughout the course of the series (she does not, for instance, transform from tomboy to feminine young woman – after the third book, she does

⁶¹ Bal, M. *Narratology*, p.85.

not even age, which thereby limits her capacity for transformation), we do see her learning about friendship, trust and loyalty, especially in the first three books of the series, which dramatically changes her social and emotional life.

The formulaic text is predictable; in each book of a series, similar situations occur to bring about predictable character reactions. I have pointed out that in the *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, Bess is always the first one to admire the surroundings or fantasise about food; in the *Famous Five*, George will always be pleased when she is mistaken for a boy and furious when she is treated as a girl. We expect the boyish and horse-mad Bill to be always thinking about horses and riding, and having “horsy conversations”. The familiarity, predictability and repetition in the formula text are not necessarily bad, however. As John Cawelti writes,

Audiences find satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form; in addition, the audience’s past experience with a formula gives it a sense of what to expect in new individual examples, thereby increasing its capacity for understanding and enjoying the details of a work.⁶²

Perry Nodelman describes the pleasure of formula as the repetition of “the comfortably familiar experience of stories we have enjoyed before.”⁶³ Nicholas

Tucker has suggested that the formulaic fiction of Blyton serves a useful purpose:

⁶² Cawelti, John G. *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976, p.9. The Stratemeyer Syndicate’s fiction factory showed that if a successful, attractive formula was established, it could prove to be a productive and lucrative pursuit. Cawelti writes: “For creators, the formula provides a means for the rapid and efficient production of new works. Once familiar with the outlines of a formula, the writer who devotes himself to this sort of creation does not have to make as many difficult decisions as a novelist working with no formula. Thus, formulaic creators tend to be extremely prolific”, p.9. This could well explain Blyton’s prolificacy.

⁶³ Nodelman, P. *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, p.11.

“Children need Blyton for the same reasons that adults read Agatha Christie when they want to dip into something well-ordered and predictable”.⁶⁴ Sheila Ray suggests that Blyton’s books,

like most popular books, are about desirable experience rather than realistic experience. She meets the need for stories of wish fulfilment, stories which provide compensatory and escapist reading, to an extent which few other authors for children have achieved. Books at this level satisfy children, who can accept improbabilities, the simple black or white characters and the over simplified and direct motivation... it the adult, not the child, who wants background detail to give reality to fiction; as far as the child is concerned, detailed descriptions merely hold up the action.⁶⁵

Rudd argues that in the literary style of storytelling, “[c]haracter is central, action secondary, and deriving from the former”, and in the oral tradition of storytelling, the action comes first; the behaviour of characters tend to be a function of the plot: “As the characters need to be swiftly drawn for the audience to visualise them, there is a tendency to rely on traditional figures, whether archetypal or stereotypical”.⁶⁶ Certain recognisable, stock character types do recur throughout Blyton’s work; there are a number of boys with special talents with animals; rough but ultimately good-hearted and courageous circus or gipsy girls; friendly, jolly fat housekeepers or cooks. But although we recognise these figures and have an

⁶⁴ Tucker, N. *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 April 1970, p.422. Cited by Ray, S.G. *The Blyton Phenomenon*, p.103.

⁶⁵ Ray, S.G. *The Blyton Phenomenon*, pp.114-116. Ray also suggests that “[Blyton’s] plots are well constructed and undoubtedly exciting, but the simplicity of the writing and of the characterization lays them open to criticism because, to an adult reader, they are often incredible”, p.201.

⁶⁶ Rudd, D. *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children’s Literature*, p.159.

expectation of what they will do and how they will behave, the characters are not identical. They are part of different stories have different relationships with other characters and do different things.⁶⁷ And of course, there are tomboys.

In the Blyton series, tomboyishness is a distinguishing character attribute, rather than something that must be grown out of. There are certain attributes common to Blyton's tomboys. They tend to have an affinity with particular animals, usually dogs or horses; their fondness for dogs or horses tends to be taken to a level of obsession. They are not comfortable with "normal" socialising with other children, especially with more 'girly' girls, preferring the company of their chosen animals. The tomboys are not, however, clones of one another, and the details of their stories are quite different. George is devoted one particular dog, being her dog Timmy; Bill is "horse-mad" and obsessed with her horse Thunder. For George, looking after Timmy and tending to his needs or pleasure is of the highest priority: she even makes him sausage meat sandwiches for a picnic; she rubs camphor oil on his chest when he has a bad cough. Bill puts tending to Thunder before everything else – schoolwork, participation in form activities and forming friendships.

⁶⁷ The boy with the special talent with animals e.g. Philip Mannering in the "Adventure" series (1944-1955), Wilfrid in *Five Have a Mystery to Solve* (1962), Benjy in *The Children of Cherry Tree Farm* (1940); the rough but ultimately good-hearted and courageous circus or gypsy girl e.g. Jo in the Famous Five series (Jo is a recurring character who makes her first appearance in *Five Fall into Adventure* (1950). She returns in *Five Have a Wonderful Time* (1952), *Five Have Plenty of Fun* (1955), and *Five are Together Again* (1963)), and Carlotta Brown of the St. Clare's series (Carlotta comes to St. Clare's in *Summer Term at St. Clare's* (1943) and becomes a regular character for the rest of the series: *The Second form at St Clare's* (1944) *Claudine At St. Clare's* (1947) and *Fifth Formers at St Clare's* (1945)). the friendly, jolly, fat cook or housekeeper e.g. Joan, the cook at Kirrin Cottage, and Jenny the cook at Professor Hayling's home in the Famous Five series, and Dorcas in *Six Cousins at Mistletoe Farm* (1948). Interestingly, in *Five Run Away Together*, one of the villains is the stand-in cook Mrs. Stick, who is not at all friendly, jolly or fat.

George and Bill are both tomboys, but they each have a different level of self-awareness/deliberateness in their performance of masculinity. Whether we discuss the Blyton text in terms of formula or the oral tradition, George and Bill play a different and particular role within the texts/series in which they appear. The Famous Five series and the Malory Towers series each have their own particular structure and mechanics – each has its formula. In each of the series, the tomboy is a distinct (tomboyishness being the distinguishing attribute) member of the group: George is part of an adventuring group; Bill is one of a ‘group’ of new girls in her first term, and later, she is a member of her form group. Their family circumstances and social circles are quite different: George is an only child, devoted to her dog; her only friends (so it appears) are her cousins; Bill is the only girl in a family with seven boys; her whole family is “horse-mad”. Her tomboyishness is attributed to her being brought up as the only girl in a family of seven boys. Bill is part of her school form of girls, but is more comfortable with horses, or on her own than with the other girls. In the Famous Five series, George is a source of conflict and acts as a plot-enabler. In the Malory Towers series, Bill arrives as a new girl, bringing with her a problem that must be resolved/lesson that must be learned, one of the school term’s/book’s plots.

George and Bill’s obsessions with their beloved animals are portrayed as weaknesses, or at least, unusual, not quite “normal”. George’s devotion to Timmy creates conflict and/or dangerous situations, but this is part of her role in the text as a plot enabler. In *Five Go to Smuggler’s Top*, the children are sent to stay with the

Lenoirs because repairs must be done at Kirrin Cottage. Although George is told that she is not allowed to take Timmy, she does so anyway, and a significant part of the story revolves around the children's attempts to keep Timmy hidden from the adults. In *Five Get into a Fix*, George throws herself in front of a pack of dogs when she thinks Timmy is about to be attacked by them – after this incident, she is all set to return home, worried for Timmy's safety; Dick and Julian come up with the perfect solution – the Five will stay in a mountain chalet, away from the dogs, which leads the Five into their adventure. Bill is so obsessed with her horse that her schoolwork and interpersonal relationships within her form suffer. She is one-dimensional – only seeing her horse and not allowing herself to develop in other ways (we are told that she would've been a very talented lacrosse player, if she would only practice, for example). Knowing how much Thunder means to Bill heightens the drama of his illness and the urgency of Miss Peters' heroic ride in the middle of the night to fetch the veterinarian.

George

The character of George is by far the most extreme example of tomboyishness in this thesis. She not only resents having been born a girl, she refuses to acknowledge that she is one. She refuses outright to perform her gender as she is expected to. She rejects the name with which she has been christened, answering only to the masculine, shortened form of it. She deliberately performs masculinity, imitating the mannerisms, posture and gait of boys. She aspires to only display "masculine" emotions, and never to cry in front of anyone.

In a similar way to the Trixie Belden Mystery series (which I discussed in Chapter Four), the Famous Five series started as ‘books in series’, but from the fourth book onwards the series began to resemble ‘series books’. The first three books demonstrate a discernible chronological continuity. In *Five on a Treasure Island*, Julian, Dick and Anne spend their summer holidays at their Uncle Quentin and Aunt Fanny’s home on Kirrin Bay, meeting their cousin George and her dog for the first time. The next book, *Five Go Adventuring Again* (1942) takes place later that same year, with the Five reunited during the Christmas school holidays. In the third book, *Five Run Away Together* (1944) the narrator tells us that all of the children are “a year older and a year bigger than when they had had their exciting adventures in Kirrin Island”.⁶⁸ The continuity is demonstrated not only in age and the progression of time – in *Five on a Treasure Island*, George tells her cousins that her mother’s family owns Kirrin Cottage, Kirrin Island and also a farmhouse; in *Five Go Adventuring Again*, the children visit that farmhouse (called Kirrin Farmhouse), where they find a secret way that connects the farmhouse to Kirrin Cottage. Trixie Belden’s age is ‘frozen’ and is given as fourteen for the remainder of the series after the sixteenth book; at the start of each book after the third one, when the characters are re-introduced to the reader, Julian is identified as the oldest, Dick and George “come next” and Anne is the youngest – no ages are mentioned. The Famous Five series faced similar challenges relating to age as those that affected the Trixie Belden series. Obviously, there were no problems related to developing sexuality/romance, but had the children continued to age, Julian would have been twenty-four by the end of the series, with Dick and George twenty-three

⁶⁸ Blyton, E. *Five Run Away Together*, p.10.

and Anne twenty-two, a rather improbable and untenable group of protagonists for a children's adventure series.⁶⁹ The age-freezing is also particularly important for George, as if she continued to age, one would expect her to grow out of her tomboyishness (and as has been established, the focus of the series was not on the process of growing up). As she does not grow up, George remains plausibly boyish in her appearance and behaviour.

The group dynamic remains the same throughout the series; Julian is the fair-haired leader, Dick the always-hungry, funny dark-haired boy, George the rebellious and "difficult" tomboy and Anne, the housekeeper and most timid member. Although Anne does lose much of her babyishness by the end of the series (she is noticeably less easily frightened and less likely to burst into tears when upset or stressed), she remains the most reluctant adventurer of the Five. The stories are focused on adventure-plots, not the protagonists' personal development, and so, for Blyton, the tomboy is not here to "grow up", but to act as a plot enabler and source of conflict.

Part of the first sixteen chronological Trixie Belden books centred on Trixie's personal development and struggles with femininity; in the Famous Five series, the first few books focus on George's personal development. George is introduced as the 'other' – she is an only child, a loner. Blyton shifts the focalization, that is, what Bal describes as "the 'vision', the agent that sees, and that

⁶⁹ Ages as estimated by Eva Rice, *Who's Who in Enid Blyton*, p.9.

which is seen”⁷⁰ between characters as suits the plot: “If the focalizer coincides with the character... The reader watches with the character’s eyes and will be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character”.⁷¹ When *Five on a Treasure Island* begins, the focalization is with Julian, Dick and Anne, as they prepare for their holiday. In the chapter entitled, “The Strange Cousin”, Anne is the first to meet George. The focalization is with Anne, and the description of this first meeting is based on Anne’s impressions of “the strange cousin”:

...she looked across at the other bed. In it lay the figure of another child, curled up under the bed-clothes. Anne could just see the top of a curly head, and that was all...

The child in the opposite bed sat up and looked across at Anne. She had very short curly hair, almost as short as a boy’s. Her face was burnt a dark-brown with the sun, and her very blue eyes looked as bright as forget-me-nots in her face. But her mouth was rather sulky, and she had a frown like her father’s.

George flung open the door and marched out with her head high. She took no notice of the two surprised boys at all. She stalked downstairs. The three children looked at one another.

‘She won’t answer if you call her Georgina,’ explained Anne. ‘She’s awfully queer, I think. She says she didn’t want us to come because we’ll interfere with her. She laughed at me, and was rather rude’.⁷²

⁷⁰ Bal, M. *Narratology*, p.104

⁷¹ Bal, M. *Narratology*, p.104.

⁷² Blyton, E. *Five on a Treasure Island*, p.19.

When the series begins, George is unaccustomed to socialising with other children. Slowly, as she befriends her cousins, she reflects on herself, her behaviour and on the friendship that they offer. During such moments, the focalization shifts back to her. She becomes, in such passages, less “strange” to the reader; as the cousins are getting to know, like and understand George, so is the reader:

‘I think I’d have been much nicer if I hadn’t been on my own so much,’ thought George to herself... ‘Talking about things to other people does help a lot. They don’t seem so dreadful then; they seem more bearable and ordinary. I like my three cousins awfully. I like them because they talk and laugh and are always cheerful and kind. I wish I was like them. I’m sulky and bad-tempered and fierce, and no wonder Father doesn’t like me and scolds me so often. Mother’s dear, but I understand now why she says I am difficult. I’m different from my cousins – they’re easy to understand, and everyone likes them. I’m glad they came. They are making me more like I ought to be’.⁷³

George (and thus, presumably, the reader – and here is an example of the politics of advocacy) learns the pleasure of sharing and having friends. Although George does have such moments of self-reflection and she does learn to get along with her cousins, she does remain for the duration of the series, “sulky, bad-tempered and fierce”. George is the most temperamental and “difficult” member of the Five. Her character flaws not only make her a distinct member of her adventuring group, they create conflict and drama and contribute directly to plot development. There is

⁷³ Blyton, E. *Five on a Treasure Island*, p.103.

therefore no need for George to overcome her “weaknesses”: her stubbornness, her petulance and her obsession with her dog *make things happen* in the stories. For example: In *Five Go Adventuring Again*, George, being her obstinate self, refuses to accept Dick’s suggestion that some people including the new tutor may not like dogs. She tells Dick, ““If Mr. Roland doesn’t like Timothy, I’ll not do a single thing for him!”” Of course, as it happens, Mr. Roland does *not* take to Timothy, and the feeling appears to be mutual, which makes it impossible for George to get along with the tutor. The tension between George and Mr. Roland drives the plot – George becomes isolated from her cousins, who like Mr. Roland; George’s disobedience and refusal to cooperate with Mr. Roland and her parents results in Timmy being banished to the kennel outside; George is the only one to suspect Mr. Roland’s involvement when some of her father’s work goes missing, and so on. In *Five on Kirrin Island Again*, George reluctantly leaves Timmy with her father on Kirrin Island. When she becomes convinced that something has happened to Timmy, she takes it upon herself to row over to Kirrin Island at night to investigate, where she discovers that her father is being held hostage; she must then send Timmy through an underground tunnel to get help. In *Five on a Secret Trail*, Timmy gets a cut in his ear and must wear a cardboard collar to allow the cut heal; everyone who sees him makes fun of his comical appearance, and George is so upset and offended by this that she decides to take Timmy away camping to avoid people. She is later joined by her cousins, and it is while they are camping that they stumble upon an adventure.

Cadogan and Craig suggest that like all tomboys, George can only be “‘as good as’, but this implies a basic deficiency. She can never be the genuine article”.⁷⁴ Rudd disagrees with Cadogan and Craig’s suggestion that George is a “token boy”, that is, “as good as, but not the real thing”.⁷⁵ In *Five Go off in a Caravan*, George and Anne have this little exchange, where Anne points out what George refuses to accept:

‘I’m going to drive *our* caravan,’ said George. ‘Anne wouldn’t be any good at it, though I’ll let her have a turn at it sometimes. Driving is a man’s job.’

‘Well, you’re only a girl!’ said Anne indignantly. “You’re not a man, nor even a boy!”

George put on one of her scowls. She always wanted to be a boy, and even thought of herself as one. She didn’t like to be reminded that she was only a girl.⁷⁶

Cadogan and Craig suggest that George is “not quite fairly treated: there is no suggestion that her fantasy of being a boy is just as ‘normal’ as Anne’s acceptance of a ‘housewifely’ role”.⁷⁷ They cite the example of George clashing with another tomboy, Henry (full name Henrietta) in *Five Go to Mystery Moor*. The two tomboys take an instant disliking to one another and continue to antagonise each other

⁷⁴ Cadogan, M. and P. Craig. *You’re A Brick, Angela!* p.338.

⁷⁵ Rudd, D. *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children’s Literature*, p.116, and Cadogan, M. and P. Craig. *You’re A Brick, Angela!* p.338.

⁷⁶ Blyton, E. *Five Go off in a Caravan*, p.28.

⁷⁷ Cadogan, M. and P. Craig. *You’re A Brick, Angela!* p.342.

throughout the book.⁷⁸ As Cadogan and Craig point out, “George and Henry react to one another ‘like a couple of idiotic schoolgirls’, and this makes George’s well-adjusted cousins laugh. It also underlines the fact that they are *not* boys”.⁷⁹ Captain Johnson scolds George and Henry, reminding them that they are girls:

‘You two girls!’ he said.

‘...Always apeing the boys, pretending to you’re so mannish! Give me Anne here, any day! What you want is your ears boxing!’⁸⁰

It is made painfully clear that despite their masculinised names, behaviour and appearance, George and Henry are undeniably and most definitely girls (despite their efforts to be boyish, they behave as what they are – *a couple of idiotic schoolgirls*). Throughout the series, we are given constant reminders that George is indeed a girl; four books earlier, in *Five Fall into Adventure*, Dick tells George, “I know you make out you’re as good as a boy, and you dress like a boy and climb trees as well as I can – but it’s really time you gave up thinking you’re as good as a boy”.⁸¹ In *Five Go to Mystery Moor*, it is Henry who gives up thinking she is as good as a boy. When she must go to the Five’s rescue, she has no idea what to do. Although she could seek the help of Mrs. Johnson, she decides instead to ask William for assistance, telling herself: “He’s only eleven, I know, but he’s very sensible, and he’s a boy. He’ll know what to do. I only *pretend* to be a boy”, p.167.

⁷⁸ And in *Five Have Plenty of Fun*, George once again responds negatively to another girl who dresses like a boy. In this case, it is the American girl Berta, who pretends to be a boy to disguise herself from potential kidnappers. But George, being “difficult”, becomes jealous when Berta proves to be a more convincing boy than herself.

⁷⁹ Cadogan, M. and P. Craig. *You’re A Brick, Angela!* p.342

⁸⁰ Blyton, E. *Five Go to Mystery Moor*, p.15.

⁸¹ Blyton, E. *Five Fall into Adventure*, p.23.

And William does most confidently and competently take charge of the situation, with Henry willingly following his lead.⁸²

Rudd suggests that “[t]he problem of what is appropriate behaviour for the sexes is something that concerns children a great deal”,⁸³ and it is not surprising that appropriate gendered behaviour is given emphasis and explored throughout the Famous Five series – in fact, Rudd suggests that “the whole debate about sexism” is put “on the agenda” in the series.⁸⁴ Rudd argues that Blyton “did not just make George another tomboy... What makes her different... is her emotional reaction to things... George shows her emotions more than any other character in the series, much to her chagrin...”.⁸⁵ Rudd cites a number of examples of George’s emotions, including expressions of her love for Timmy and her outbursts of passionate anger. Rudd points out that in *Five on a Treasure Island*, although Anne is supposed to be the cry-baby of the group, George actually cries more times than Anne.⁸⁶ In *Five Run Away Together*, George loses her appetite when she is worried about her mother who has been taken to hospital. These examples are precisely what make George *not* “the genuine article”. George believes, as do most of Blyton’s characters, that males are not supposed to cry – crying is a sign of femininity, weakness and inferiority. At the end of *Five Go off to Camp*, Jock is ashamed of his father, not because he has been arrested, but because he howls “dismally” as the police lead him away.

⁸² Blyton, E. *Five Go to Mystery Moor*, p.167.

⁸³ Rudd, D. *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children’s Literature*, p.116.

⁸⁴ Rudd, D. *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children’s Literature*, p.116.

⁸⁵ Rudd, D. *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children’s Literature*, p.116.

⁸⁶ Blyton, E. *Five Go off to Camp*, p.182.

Rudd argues that George's displays of emotion are what "distances her from the boys" – *exactly*! Although George possesses attributes that are associated with boys rather than girls – she is physically strong (a better swimmer and diver than her male cousins), agile (a better climber), undeniably courageous and demonstrates a capacity for aggression (in probably the single-most aggression action taken by any of the children in the whole series, she destroys the villains' boat motor with an axe at the end of *Five on a Treasure Island*), she is also intensely emotional. Both she and Anne cry during the series; Julian and Dick do not. Now Rudd explicitly states that he does not want to fall into the essentialist or dualist argument that girls are emotional, boys rational – but I argue that this dualism is at the base of Blyton's depiction of gender. I have argued that Blyton does play with gender roles, but there are particular gender lines that she does not cross and that are clearly demarcated – including that boys don't fight girls and that girls are more emotional than boys (and boys *shouldn't* cry). Ultimately, George *is* emotional and she *is* a girl. No matter how convincing her outward performance of masculinity, George will always ultimately fail in her quest to be a boy – she can at best only be a flawed copy of a boy (with the fatal flaw which is her femaleness). Craig argues that the evolution of the tomboy and athletic schoolgirl characters in children's fiction was not "a step toward an equality of treatment for the boy and girl characters, since it was the *girl* who was remodeled along the lines of the superior construction, and who remained, at best, only a convincing imitation".⁸⁷ George can only imitate a boy; she will never be an authentic one.

⁸⁷ Craig, Patricia. *Nova*, November 1972, p.51. Cited in Wignell, Edna, *Boys Whistle Girls Sing: Sexism in Children's Books*. Richmond, VIC: Primary Education (Publishing), 1976, p.19.

Bill

The Malory Towers school series was published from 1946 to 1951. The six books in the series follow Darrell Rivers as a new first-former in the first book all the way until she reaches the sixth form and becomes Head Girl of the school. The tomboy of Malory Towers that I will be focusing on is the horse-mad Bill, whose real name is Wilhelmina but whose surname is never mentioned. Bill joins the series in *Third Year at Malory Towers* (1948) and remains a regular character until the final book of the series.

Blyton's school series follow a basic structure: each book in the series signifies a new school year or term, and with each new term, there will be usually at least two or three new girls in the form.⁸⁸ Each new girl will have a lesson to learn, or a problem that must be resolved; the learning of the lesson or the resolution of the problem will form one of that particular book's storylines. Of course, in between these new girl storylines will be other plots involving the rest of the form, including sports (swimming, tennis, lacrosse), the playing of tricks, midnight feasts and so on.

The school story is more overtly didactic than the adventure story – that is, it more actively *advocates* desirable morals and behaviour. The lessons learned by the schoolgirls are basic ones, for example, that stealing and cheating are wrong. Blyton presents these in different ways. Lessons related to stealing, for example, include:

⁸⁸ This also is true in Blyton's St. Clare's series, and in the three Naughtiest Girl books, which are set in a co-educational school.

Daphne, who steals so that she can appear to be rich (*Second Term at Malory Towers*); Kathleen, who is poor and steals so that she can afford to be generous towards others (*The Twins at St. Clare's*); Eileen, who steals to support her unemployed brother (*Claudine at St. Clare's*); Jo, who takes money she believes to be rightfully hers from Matron's office, but upon realising she has taken five extra pounds decides to "borrow" the surplus, and spends it instead of returning it (*Last Term at Malory Towers*).

Blyton's school stories do follow a progressive timeline (obviously, the girls progress through the school forms with each book); age-freezing, therefore, is not used. The characters, however, develop in a fairly limited capacity. Each girl's identity is established via a particular attribute that remains her identifying feature for the rest of the series. In *Malory Towers*, for example, we have the class trickster and sharp-tongued Alicia, Irene the musical genius, Belinda the artist, and in *Third Year at Malory Towers*, Mavis the singer, and Bill the horse-mad tomboy. Consequent terms add more distinct identities, such as the domineering dictator, Moira and Catherine the class doormat in *Fifth Formers at St. Clare's*.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the Trixie Belden series editors' "Fear of Sex" and their strategy of revision and the age-freezing of characters to avoid potential complications from characters growing older. In Blyton's works, fifth and sixth formers do not indulge in midnight feasting or playing tricks (they are supposedly too serious and dignified), but Blyton ensures that these two enjoyable and essential

elements of boarding school life remain a feature of each school term; Auchmuty comments, “as her heroines reach the late teens, Blyton tends to shift her focus to a new set of characters in the junior forms; she never seems entirely comfortable with the portrayal of older children”.⁸⁹ In *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*, when the central characters (Darrell, Bill etc.) have reached the age of fifteen, Blyton introduces Darrell Rivers’ younger sister Felicity and Alicia Johns’ younger cousin June to the school as first-formers. Blyton employs a similar strategy in her St. Clare’s series, by introducing Antoinette, younger sister of Claudine. A number of storylines can then be focused on the girls in the lower forms, which of course include midnight feasts and tricks. Blyton even includes cross-over storylines/events where the older and younger girls interact, e.g. in *Last Term at Malory Towers*, two runaways are discovered by Bill, Clarissa and Miss Peters who are out on a morning ride, an elaborate two-part trick is played by the second formers in the sixth-formers’ class and June Johns rescues Amanda who is injured on the rocks during a forbidden ocean swim. In *Last Term at Malory Towers*, the sixth-formers do discuss their plans for beyond school – Irene is going to study music, Darrell, Sally and Alicia are going to university, and Bill and Clarissa will be opening a riding school. I have already pointed out this strategy of introducing new, younger characters to books in series, when the central character/s have grown up, was used in Alcott’s *Little Men* (when all the March sisters are adults), and the introduction of young Bill in the Billabong series (after the marriages of the main sister and brother characters Norah and Jim). Rose Wilder suggested that Carrie

⁸⁹ Auchmuty, R. *A World of Girls*, p.101.

should become the central character of the Little House series as Laura got older, but this was vetoed by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Bill's distinct identity is established as soon as she arrives at Malory Towers. She arrives, in a unique manner, signalled by the "clatter of horse hooves" with her brothers on horseback. This, and her boyish appearance make their impression on her new classmates, and the reader. As the girls watch her arrival from the sewing room window,

Nobody had been able to see clearly what Wilhelmina had looked like. In fact, it had been difficult to tell her from the boys, as they had all been in riding breeches.⁹⁰

When Jean, the head-girl of the third form meets Wilhelmina, her impression of the new girl is that she is "somebody who, except for the school tunic, looked exactly like a boy!"⁹¹ Looking like a boy is not portrayed as a negative, even in this girls-only world; Bill remains a boyish-looking tomboy throughout her time in the series.⁹² Bill's tomboyishness is attributed to her being brought up as the only girl among seven brothers; unlike George, Bill's tomboyish appears to be a product of upbringing (more "natural" and benign, somehow) and not an expression of rebellion or discontentment.⁹³ In her first term, Bill's storyline

⁹⁰ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*. London: Dragon Books, 1972, p.28.

⁹¹ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p.29.

⁹² Because the tomboyishness is a distinguishing character trait, such as the artist, the musical genius, the actress and the trickster, the tomboy remains a tomboy for the duration of the series.

⁹³ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p.14.

is related to her obsession for her horse, not her tomboyishness; she must learn to enjoy and take part in aspects of life other than those related to her horse.⁹⁴

The narrator's description of Bill clearly marks her as one of the "good characters". She has a "boyish grin that showed white teeth set very evenly" and "Jean liked her at once".⁹⁵

Wilhelmina had hair cropped almost as short as a boy's. It curled a little, which she hated. Her face was boyish and square, with a tip-tilted nose, a big mouth, and big, wide-set eyes of hazel-brown. She was covered with freckles from forehead to firm little chin.⁹⁶

Bill's devotion to Thunder is of a similarly intense degree to George's love of Timmy. Just like George, she would not have agreed to go to boarding school if she had not been allowed to bring her pet. Bill thinks only of her horse, telling Jean that if she finds boarding to be awful she will saddle up Thunder and ride away. She is prepared to miss lessons to look after him, as she trusts no one else tend to him. Just as George rejects her full name, Bill rejects "Wilhelmina". On her very first day, she asks her classmates to call her Bill: "If you all start calling me Wilhelmina I shall be miserable. I shan't feel I'm myself".⁹⁷ Although, as the narrator points

⁹⁴ That term, the other new girls are Mavis, who is a talented but conceited singer, and Zerelda, who thinks of herself as a sophisticated, glamorous starlet. Both Mavis and Zerelda's "lessons" involve their coming to terms with being ordinary schoolgirls and realising that they are not stars.

⁹⁵ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p.29.

⁹⁶ As opposed to Mavis, who is portrayed as quite unlikable in her first term, described as "lazy and selfish", with "a small discontented, conceited little face, with small dark eyes and a big mouth", p.15. Mavis redeems herself later after she is humbled by losing her voice, but she is not one of the truly likeable characters – and never becomes one of Darrell's close friends. Zerelda is made fun of, as an American – her accent and vanity are ridiculed by the narrator and the girls.

⁹⁷ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p.31.

out, a new girl asking for a nickname is out of order as far as schoolgirl etiquette goes (“Nicknames were only given when people knew you and liked you”), the girls do agree that Wilhelmina shall be called Bill, “They couldn’t help liking this sturdy, freckled girl with her short hair and frank smile. She *was* Bill. They couldn’t possibly call her anything else”.⁹⁸

Bill refuses to listen to the advice of Miss Peters and Jean, who both try to convince her not to make Thunder the one and only obsession of her life: “She had, as Miss Peters said, thought, dreamt, smelt, groomed, ridden horses all her life, and she just didn’t want to do anything else”.⁹⁹ When Miss Peters punishes Bill by forbidding her to see Thunder, Bill ignores this directive and continues seeing her horse.¹⁰⁰ Eventually, Miss Peters finds out Bill’s deception, and makes arrangements to send Thunder home. Bill is, of course, devastated. She goes to cry alone in the dormitory, because she, like other characters in Blyton’s books, also believes that “boys don’t cry”: “Bill boasted that she never cried... Her seven brothers had taught her to be tough and boyish, and like a boy, she had scorned ever to shed a tear”.¹⁰¹

The drama builds when Thunder develops colic and a veterinarian must be sent for in the middle of the night. While Bill and Darrell walk Thunder around to keep him on his feet, Miss Peters heroically rides out in the dark through pouring

⁹⁸ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p.31.

⁹⁷ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁰ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p.68.

¹⁰¹ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p.96.

rain to summon the vet who is on a farm five miles away. This dramatic rescue is entwined with the roadside rescue of Mavis, who has had a misadventure of her own, and is well on her way to learning her lesson.

The consequences of the dramatic night of rescues are positive (resolution of problem/learning of lesson). Mavis loses her voice, but is humbled by the experience and becomes a less conceited, more likable person. Bill resolves to pay Miss Peters for saving Thunder, and does her best to be an attentive student. She ceases to be the one-dimensional person she was, and although still horse-mad, she becomes more involved with form activities, and even becomes friends with Miss Peters:

They understood one another, which wasn't very surprising, because they were very much alike. Miss Peters was mannish, and Bill was boyish. They both loved life out-of-doors and adored horses. They had disliked one another very much indeed – but now they were going to be firm friends.¹⁰²

Interestingly, in the third-form mistress is the masculine Miss Peters, described by the narrator as “rather hearty and loud-voiced”.¹⁰³ Rosemary Auchmuty comments on Blyton's depiction of the “mannish spinster” schoolteacher, finding it interesting that Blyton, writing *Third Year at Malory Towers* in 1948 was apparently not

daunted by the image of the lesbian... There were plenty of such women to be found in real schools, but the strength of the anti-lesbian campaign tended to put writers off including them in books for girls. Perhaps Blyton

¹⁰² Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p.122.

¹⁰³ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p.29.

was so preoccupied with churning out her 10,000 words a day that all this publicity passed her by.¹⁰⁴

As Blyton never tackles the issues of sexuality, adulthood or marriage in the series (presumably subjects she deemed of no interest and inappropriate for her intended audience), the significance of Miss Peters' mannishness and of course, perhaps even Bill's boyishness are never associated with sexuality. The girls in Blyton's school series do not appear to ever think of anything vaguely related to sex, and none of the teachers have partners. The all-female world of the school does not include anything to do with sex. The reader may draw his or her own allusions about Miss Peters, but the text itself offers no suggestions.

With Bill having learned her 'lesson', Blyton then tackles the issue of friendship. In Blyton's school stories it is customary for friends to be in pairs or threes (most commonly pairs). By the end of *Third Year at Malory Towers*, Bill has become more of an active member of her form, but she still has no best friend. At the end of *Third Year at Malory Towers*, Darrell wishes that Bill has a special friend, commenting to her own best friend Sally that Bill is "rather on her own". Sally assures Darrell that Bill doesn't really need a friend: "honestly I think Thunder takes the place of a friend with her".¹⁰⁵ The narrator tells us, in *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*:

¹⁰⁴ Auchmuty, R. *A World of Girls*, p.157.

¹⁰⁵ Blyton, E. *Third Year at Malory Towers*, p.143.

Bill had no best friend, but she didn't want one. Thunder was hers. Bill was better with boys than girls, because, having seven brothers she understood boys and not girls. She was the only fourth-former who chose to learn carpentry from Mr. Sutton, and did not in the least mind going with the first- and second-formers who enjoyed his teaching so much. She had already produced a pipe for her father, a ship for her brother, and a bowl-stand for her mother, and was as proud of these as any of the good embroiderers were of their cushions, or the weavers of their scarves.¹⁰⁶

In *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*, Bill is more of a background character, as once again the spotlight falls on the new girls. By the end of this term, however, Bill unexpectedly becomes friends with new girl Clarissa, who as it turns out, also loves horses.¹⁰⁷ Bill and Clarissa continue to be best friends for the rest of the series, enjoying horsey conversations and morning rides with Miss Peters.

¹⁰⁶ Blyton, E. *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*. London: Dragon Books, 1987, p.33.

¹⁰⁷ Clarissa's distinguishing feature is her looks... and her weak heart. When she first comes to the school, she is described as "small and undersized-looking... She wore glasses with thick lenses, and had a wire round her teeth to keep them back. Her only beauty seemed to be her hair, which was thick and wavy, and a lovely auburn colour", p.35. When Clarissa arrives at Malory Towers she has a weak heart and is forbidden from playing games or swimming. The other girls do not make fun of her because she is unable (not unwilling) to play games. For much of her first term, Clarissa is Gwendoline's best friend; Gwendoline attaches herself to Clarissa because of her Honourable title (her full name is The Honourable Clarissa Carter). But when Clarissa eventually sees Gwen as the two-faced person she really is, she runs away from Gwen, crying, and bumps into Bill, who offers her "one cure for happiness – riding a horse", p.93. Near the end of term, Clarissa surprises everyone when she returns from the dentist and oculist without the wire over her teeth and her glasses. The difference to her appearance is tremendous, and her distinguishing feature is no longer her being ugly undersized duckling, but class beauty: "She stood laughing in front of them – her deep green eyes flashing round, and her white teeth no longer spoilt by an ugly wire. Her wavy auburn hair suited her eyes, and she looked unusual and somehow distinguished", p.132. Clarissa's bad heart is never mentioned again – obviously, it was a plot device, leading to Gwen's faked bad heart storyline.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the revision of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories resulted in the transformation of the tomboy character of George Fayne, and George's overt tomboyishness continued to fade as the series continued. Cadogan and Craig suggest that the Famous Five's George's tomboyishness is excusable because of her age;¹⁰⁸ George, and Bill of Malory Towers are both very boyish, and they are indeed younger than George Fayne, whose age became fixed at eighteen in the revised books. Not only does the Famous Five's George not age officially; her sulky and petulant behaviour emphasise her continuing immaturity, which is an important part of her role as a plot enabler and creator of conflict. In *Five Go to Mystery Moor*, for example, she competes with and antagonises Henry, much to everyone's exasperation. When her cousins invite Henry to spend the day with them, George refuses to go along, and instead feigns a headache. It is while the others are out for the day that George meets Sniffer the gypsy boy and we are introduced to the gypsies, who will go on to play a significant role in the story.

Although Bill's appearance is androgynous and boyish, she is not aggressively anti-feminine like George; Bill's tomboyishness is portrayed as a "natural" consequence of her having been brought up with seven brothers. Although Bill grows older and ends the series as a sixth-former, as discussed earlier, Blyton does not give her school characters increasingly 'mature' storylines. In *Last Term at Malory Towers*, the sixth-formers talk about their ambitions for after school, but they discuss their plans only in terms of careers and further education; nothing else is mentioned about relationships beyond the limited world of school (in fact, Bill

¹⁰⁸ Cadogan, M. and P. Craig. *You're A Brick, Angela!*, p.109.

and Clarissa's riding school will be opened near Malory Towers, so that their customers will be mainly Malory Towers pupils). In *Little Women*, for example, the March girls' world extends beyond their household and immediate family/circle of friends; marriage and motherhood are part of the world and reality of the March girls, who discuss spinsterhood and reflect on wealth and relationships.

The stories of Blyton's tomboys do not depict the process of learning to perform femininity – in between solving mysteries or having adventures or indulging in midnight feasts they learn other important lessons, such as how to trust others, to be trustworthy, how to manage relationships with others. Tomboyishness specifically, in the Blyton book, is not necessarily portrayed as a fault or phase that needs correcting. In *Six Cousins at Mistletoe Farm* (1948), Jane Longfield transforms herself from a “dirty little grub”, with unbrushed hair and teeth, bitten fingernails, dirt-streaked cheeks and filthy jodhpurs – but the lesson she learns is more to do with taking pride in one's appearance and paying attention to one's personal hygiene and grooming, rather than a specific lesson on performing femininity. It is true that in taking care with her appearance she appears to have become “quite pretty”, but her realisation of the lesson learned is not gender-specific: “What a difference it made when *people* looked after themselves even a little!”¹⁰⁹ The lesson learned by Bill is also not gender-specific – she learns not to be so obsessed with her horse, to make friends and to be an active and contributing member of her class. In *Summer Term at St. Clare's*, the tomboy “Don't Care” Bobby Ellis is made to realise that using her good brains only for playing tricks is a

¹⁰⁹ Blyton, E. *Six Cousins at Mistletoe Farm*, p.142, my italics.

form of cheating – cheating her parents who are paying her school fees and who expect her to do her best, and of course, cheating herself. Bobby resolves to apply herself in her school work from there on. At the end of their respective series, Bill and Bobby are still tomboys, with no sign of changing. It is also interesting to note, as Auchmuty comments, that

It is noteworthy that in Blyton's school stories the silliest characters are the most feminine, who are portrayed as vain, affected, over-concerned with their appearance, antipathetic to all sports (especially swimming), and prone to crushes.¹¹⁰

In her school stories, Blyton presents the most feminine girls as typically 'weak', flawed in character and in general, quite unlikable – Malory Towers' Gwendoline Mary Lacey and Angela Favorleigh of St. Clare's, for example, are both snobbish and deceitful and struggle at sports as well as academic studies. Neither girl's character is redeemed; each girl's story has an unhappy ending: Gwendoline must leave Malory Towers to become a secretary to support her family when her father falls gravely ill, and Angela fails her examinations, becoming only one of three girls who will not be moving up to the sixth form. Both school series also feature vain, silly and feminine American girls, Zerelda Brass in Malory Towers, and the wealthy Sadie Greene in St. Clare's. Sadie, for example, is so vain that her only concern upon rescue from her kidnappers is to fix her tussled hair.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Auchmuty, R. *A World of Girls*, p. 158.

¹¹¹ Blyton also portrays a number of ultra-feminine mothers who are vain, snobbish and selfish, such as Mrs. Lacey (Gwendoline's mother), Mrs. Favorleigh (Angela's mother) and Aunt Rose (*Six Cousins at Mistletoe Farm*), contrasting them negatively with 'sensible' mothers such as Mrs. Rivers (Darrell's mother), Mrs. O'Sullivan (the twins' mother), and Mrs. Longfield/Aunt Linnie.

Blyton aimed to educate and guide her readers as well as entertain them. Her stories undoubtedly strongly *advocate* particular desirable values and morals. Blyton's texts also demonstrate the politics of *assent* at work; it is clear that she has unquestioningly adopted certain ideologies which we may find sexist, racist and classist today. However, her work should not be condemned simply because of the evolution in values between Blyton's time and today. On the charge of sexism, for example, there are of course, numerous examples which we can point towards, where in adventures the boys take on the so-called active roles while the girls are delegated meal preparation duties. But we can also find numerous examples where Blyton subverts or 'plays' with gender assumptions – boys and girls happily shell peas together; Uncle Quentin is silly while Aunt Fanny is sensible and reliable; big and strong Alfredo lives meekly under the rule of his tiny wife. Blyton also portrays feminine domesticity in a positive and empowering light through Anne, who demonstrates admirable skill and gains genuine pleasure in her role of housekeeper for the Five. George is courageous and adventurous, but can't be relied upon to boil eggs for supper; Anne, on the other hand, may not be quite so gung-ho in the face of adventure, but her contribution to the group is infinitely valuable.

In the following chapter, I explore the principal characters in two fantasy series by Tamora Pierce. I argue that in these recently published texts, the tomboy construct is no longer present, but has been instead replaced by a girl who is proactive, strong and courageous, without the need to imitate or want to be a boy. This evolved girl can be courageous as well as physical, adventurous and even

violent, and still be recognised as a girl. I will demonstrate how, despite this change, Pierce's texts still function within the heteronormative system of gender.

Chapter 6

So Why Can't Girls be Courageous? Tamora Pierce's Lady Knights

The focus of this chapter is on the female protagonists – two girls who want to become knights – in two fantasy series by Tamora Pierce: Alanna of Trebond in the Song of the Lioness quartet (1983–1988) and Keladry of Mindelan, known as Kel, in the Protector of the Small quartet (1999–2002).¹ Although both characters challenge the gendered limitations imposed upon them in their pursuit of their dreams of becoming knights, Alanna and Kel are not specifically referred to as tomboys. In this chapter, I will argue that they are indeed *not* tomboys. They are, instead, examples of the evolved, empowered girl character who is proactive, strong and brave, who can rescue and conquer alongside the boys (sometimes, even lead them) and yet still be recognised as *a girl being a girl* – because *girls can be courageous* (as well as physical, adventurous and even violent) *too*.

Both quartets are books in series: they follow a clear chronology and continuity; over the course of each series, the characters age and develop. Each series follows its protagonist's journey as she trains and then becomes a knight. The series are both set in the same fantasy universe, based in a kingdom called Tortall. Each series may be read independently of the other, but if read in order of publication, the reading of Protector of the Small will be enriched by the continuity

¹ The Song of the Lioness quartet consists of: *Alanna: The First Adventure* (1983); *In the Hand of the Goddess* (1984); *The Woman who Rides Like a Man* (1986); *Lioness Rampant* (1988). *The Protector of the Small* quartet consists of: *First Test* (1999); *Page* (2000); *Squire* (2001); *Lady Knight* (2002).

between the series, with characters featured in *Lioness* appearing (older, of course) in *Protector*.²

Although on the surface each quartet tells the same story – about a girl who wants to become a knight – Alanna and Kel face different challenges due to their differing circumstances. In *Song of the Lioness*, because girls are not permitted to train as knights Alanna comes up with the plan to disguise herself as a boy and to remain disguised as male for the eight years it will take to complete her knight training. She intends to reveal her sex only after she has been knighted – after she has proven to everyone that she is worthy of being a knight. The *Protector of the Small* quartet is set ten years after royal decree has permitted girls to train to become knights, a legacy of Alanna's success. Kel is the first girl to come forward in this new climate, determined to follow in the footsteps of her idol, the Lady Knight Alanna. Alanna and Kel are also different to one another in physical appearance as well as skills and temperament. Alanna is of small stature, while Kel is tall and strapping (her enemies refer to her by the unflattering names of *The Cow* and *The Lump*). Alanna possesses the magical Gift and the ability to heal, while Kel has no magical ability. Alanna's weapon of choice is the sword; Kel's is the

² There are in fact, currently four sets of books set in the Tortallan kingdom, and while the protagonists change for each series, all of the books feature characters that have appeared in preceding Tortallan books/series. In addition to the *Song of the Lioness* Quartet (first in the chronological order) and *Protector of the Small* (third in the order) the other books are: *The Immortals* Quartet (1992–1996, second in the chronological order), which tells the story of Daine, a girl who possesses the gift of wild magic, the ability to talk to and heal animals; and the most recently published Tortallan books, *Trickster's Choice* (2003) and *Trickster's Queen* (2004), the protagonist of which is Aliane, Alanna's daughter. Alanna is still an active knight of the realm and appears in both *Trickster* books. At the time of writing this thesis, the author's website lists more Tortallan books scheduled for future publication ("Upcoming books from Tamora Pierce", <http://www.tamora-pierce.com/newbook.htm>, accessed 1 May 2006). *Terrier*, the first volume of a new trilogy has been released in late 2006. This new series features yet another young female heroine, this time an ancestor of Alanna's husband and Aliane's father George Cooper.

glaive. Alanna develops into a hero who prefers to fight alone; Kel becomes a commander whose strength is in leading and managing other people. Alanna must learn to accept her Gift; Kel must overcome a fear of heights.³

Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair suggest that there are two dimensions to Alanna's challenge: "Her internal challenge is to overcome her fear of her own magical gifts and to accept her ability to be a healer. Her external challenge is to convince the world that a girl can be a knight".⁴ I will add that before that external challenge comes an even more fundamental and practical, if not philosophical one: throughout her training, Alanna must continue to pass as male – *Alan* must prove to *his* peers and instructors that *he* can be a knight. While Alanna remains disguised as Alan, there is no "girl" training to become a knight, as far as "the world" is concerned. She resists her Gift because it does not fit with her notion of how a knight should be.⁵ Brown and St. Clair suggest that for Alanna, "an essential part of

³ In a biography of Pierce, Donna Dailey writes about the author's intentions for the character of Kel: "With Alanna, [Pierce] had done what many first-time writers do: she tried to get everything in because she might not get another chance. So she made Alanna both a mage and a knight. Since then she had written plenty of mage characters. Now she wanted to concentrate on a knight, and she thought it would be a challenge to create a heroine with no magic...Kel would be very different from Alanna... Whereas Alanna was small and had speed going for her, as a big girl Kel's skills were going to be very different. She would be more centered, and her nature would reflect that... Kel is more easy-going than Alanna". Dailey, Donna. *Tamora Pierce (Who Wrote That?)*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006, p.117.

⁴ Brown, Joanne and Nancy St. Clair. *Declarations of Independence: Empowered Girls in Young Adult Literature, 1990-2001*. Lanham, MA; London: The Scarecrow Press, 2002, p.44.

⁵ Brown, J. and N. St. Clair. *Declarations of Independence*, p.44. Brown and St. Clair suggest that magic and healing are most identified in Alanna's culture as female. I disagree with this. In *Song of the Lioness*, the healers are female (Maude, Mistress Cooper, Alanna), but there are also mages who are male (Duke Roger, Prince Jonathan, Thom, Master Si-cham). The other Tortallan books feature additional male and female mages and healers, including Ibn Nazzir, Neal, Duke Baird, Numair, Onua, Daine and Emperor Ozorne. Brown and St. Clair do suggest that "Alanna also resists her healing gifts because she cannot reconcile using them with her notion of how a knight should behave", p.44. This is the crux of Alanna's difficulty to accept her magic/healing gifts, and why in *Alanna: The First Adventure* she tells King Roald "I want to be a knight. Using my gift doesn't

[her] challenge is not simply to establish that she can physically do what knights do but to come to a full acceptance of her other gifts as well”.⁶ In addition to learning to accept her Gift, Alanna must also learn to accept her own femaleness. Although she is determined to become a knight, Alanna has internalised many of the assumptions about gender that she has been brought up with – consequently, she constantly wrestles with self-doubt about her own ability to become a knight. She sees her femaleness as an impediment that she must hide until she can become a knight at eighteen.⁷

While Kel’s sex is no secret, her training is in many respects all the more difficult precisely because she is known to be girl – her challenges are more external than internal, often arising from external sources beyond her control. Despite the royal decree, there are still many who oppose the admission of girls into knight training. Kel’s right and ability to be a knight is constantly questioned, undermined and tested by the page training master Lord Wyldon as well as other pages, squires and knights, a number of whom are openly and physically hostile towards her.

In this chapter, I will examine the characters Alanna and Kel within the frame of three interconnected forms of text: the young adult text, the fantasy text and the novel/series of development, the *bildungsroman*. In this thesis, I have taken

seem fair, somehow. It’s as if I’m fighting dirty”, p.96. Alanna thinks of knights as *physical* warriors who fight with their bodies and weapons, not mages who cast spells and heal.

⁶ Brown, J. and N. St. Clair. *Declarations of Independence*, p.44.

⁷ Brown, J. and N. St. Clair. *Declarations of Independence*, p.46.

up Karen Sternheimer's argument that adults tend to view children as imitators and sponges who soak up the language, behaviour and attitudes that they are exposed to⁸ – and I have argued that the production of children's literature and the evolution of the tomboy character have been shaped by concern for what the "sponges" are exposed to. This concern extends to all fiction produced for young people, including the young adult text, and this is evident in *Song of the Lioness* and *Protector of the Small*. Through her protagonists, Pierce conveys numerous 'responsible' messages, including anti-violent sentiments (interestingly, through her protagonists' direct involvement in acts of violence), and scattered throughout the texts – the emphasis of the value of hard work, determination and never giving up.

While writing for a young audience constrains and/or guides the responsible author, the fantasy genre grants him or her a certain degree of freedom that is not enjoyed by the realist author – the fantasy universe created by the fantasy author does not need to be a direct reflection of the real world and its social and cultural conventions. This, combined with changing expectations in 'how girls should be' has resulted in very different *bildungsroman* to those examined earlier in this thesis.

I will assert that in the *Lioness* and *Protector* series, the figure of the girl we have called and recognised as 'the tomboy' has been replaced by a girl whose story of development follows a less-travelled path towards a very different, satisfying outcome: she matures into a woman who is physically strong, proactive, assertive,

⁸ Sternheimer, Karen. *It's Not the Media: The Truth About Pop Culture's Influence on Children*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003, p.181.

courageous, independent, ambitious and adventurous. She grows up to become a warrior, rescuer and protector. Such attributes have been mostly associated with male characters and do not fit with traditional images of femininity.^{9 10} Indeed, I will show that in *Lioness and Protector*, Pierce emphasises plot and character elements which have been traditionally associated with stories for boys as well as stories for girls. Despite the many “boy” elements, however, I will show how the texts are undoubtedly female stories of development. Although presented within a fantasy context, through Alanna and Kel, Pierce explores a number of issues directly related to the experience of growing up female, three of which I will examine: dealing with gender discrimination, learning to manage one’s own maturing and changing female body, and reflecting on the life-changing implications of marriage.

I will argue in this chapter that characters such as Alanna and Kel signify a new kind of girl, a new representation of *being female*, different to the female representations discussed in previous chapters. What Alanna and Kel force us to do is look beyond the traditional masculine/feminine, and thinking of femininity as the

⁹ This is especially true when you consider the feminine figures that have been discussed in previous chapters, such as silly Bess Marvin of the Nancy Drew series, Anne of the Famous Five, and even Jo March’s sisters.

¹⁰ Our assumptions of gendered character attributes and behaviour are precisely what makes the twist ending of Gene Kemp’s *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler* (1977) work so effectively. The protagonist’s sex is deliberately not mentioned until the final pages of the book. Up until then, Tyke’s behaviour at school, interests, friends and misadventures all lead the reader to assume that Tyke is male (her name probably also contributes to that impression). Kimberley Reynolds argues that “[w]hat Kemp achieves through this device is the foregrounding of the strength of conventions and expectations towards sex roles and to literary categories... It highlights the existence of conventions which perpetuate notions of sexual difference originating in the last century...” in *Girls Only?: Gender and Popular Children’s Fiction in Britain, 1880–1910*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, p.155.

binary opposite to masculinity, that old cliché of feminine softness and passivity, in contrast to masculine toughness and activity. Judith Butler writes that

[w]omen is... a false substantive and univocal signifier that disguises and precludes a gender experience internally varied and contradictory. ... the task is not simply to change language, but to examine language for its ontological assumptions, and to criticize those assumptions for their political consequences.¹¹

In *Alanna and Kel* we see that the gender boundary between what is denoted by ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ has become less rigid – girls *can* be strong, proactive and adventurous without needing to be tomboys or thought of as *unfeminine*– they can be strong, proactive and adventurous *without trying to be like boys*, because girls can be all of those things in their own right.

Kimberley Reynolds has argued that while many changes have taken place in juvenile fiction, with writers experimenting with form and tackling issues previously thought of as unsuitable for younger readers, “there has been little movement in the representation of sexual difference”.¹² Although *Alanna and Kel* challenge a number of gender assumptions and the traditional representations of being female, they do affirm certain long-established ideas about gender and sexual difference, specifically in relation to heterosexuality – I will explore this later in the chapter.

¹¹ Butler, J. “Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault”, in Salih, Sarah, ed. with Judith Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, p.36, my italics.

¹² Reynolds, K. *Girls Only?*, p.154.

Why Can't Girls Be Courageous?

The binary way we have thought about gender has been well-established in children's literature. In the fairy tale, for example, boys and girls have been portrayed according to what Ellen Cronan Rose terms "different developmental paradigms". These are no doubt very familiar to us – whether we personally subscribe to them or not – gendered paradigms in which boys are masculine/active and girls feminine/passive:

In fairy tales, boys are clever, resourceful, and brave. They leave home to slay giants, outwit ogres, solve riddles, find fortunes. Girls, on the other hand, stay home and sweep hearths, are patient, enduring, self-sacrificing. They are picked on by wicked stepmothers, enchanted by evil fairies. If they go out, they get lost in the woods. They are rescued from their plights by kind woodsmen, good fairies, and handsome princes. They marry and live happily ever after.¹³

In her paper entitled "From Sex-Role Stereotyping to Subjectivity", Lissa Paul suggests that female heroes of the 1970s "tended to be more like men tricked out in drag", and appeared in stories which were essentially "the same as those with male heroes in them. But instead of being about boys seeking adventure, profit, and someone to rescue, girls were in the starring roles. They rescued instead of being rescued".¹⁴ Paul goes on to discuss reclaimed fairy tales, which she suggests

¹³ Rose, Ellen Cronan, "Through the Looking Glass: When Women tell Fairy Tales". In Abel, Elizabeth, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland, eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, London: University Press of New England. 1983, pp.209-210.

¹⁴ Paul, Lissa. "From Sex-Role Stereotyping to Subjectivity: Feminism". In Hunt, Peter, ed. *Understanding Children's Literature: Key Essays from the International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. London; New York: Routledge, 1999, p.117.

demonstrate a partiality for “male characteristics in female heroes”. Paul cites Ethel Johnson Phelps’ introduction to *Tatterhood and Other Tales*, where Phelps “states a preference for stories with ‘active and courageous girls and women in the leading roles’, ones who are ‘distinguished by extraordinary courage and achievements’”, which Paul concludes, reflects “the same old male type”.¹⁵ I find Paul’s line of argument and her use of the term “male characteristics” (which by implication suggests the existence of its binary partner “female characteristics”) problematic. She seems to have fallen into an essentialist trap, unable to associate “extraordinary courage and achievements” with “female”, which is really quite insulting to females! In doing so she helps perpetuate the sex-role stereotypes – prompting the question: *so why can’t girls be courageous?* Thankfully, Pierce’s texts show us that girls can be wonderfully courageous and still be unmistakably girls. In their study of empowered girls in young adult literature, Brown and St. Clair argue that “empowered girls in young adult fiction may find strength by valuing positive feminine characteristics instead of striving to be as competitive, assertive, and powerful as boys...”¹⁶ With the rise of empowered girl characters in young adult fiction, boys are no longer the touchstones of desirable character attributes, and nor should they be, as they once were for George of the Famous Five.

It could be suggested that heroines like Alanna and Kel reflect a notion of androgyny, as discussed by Roberta Seelinger Trites. She suggests that androgyny

¹⁵ Paul, L. “From Sex-Role Stereotyping to Subjectivity: Feminism”, p.117.

¹⁶ Brown, J. and N. St. Clair. *Declarations of Independence*, p.27.

“does not necessarily mean something that is somehow *desexualised*”¹⁷ but rather, the merger of “both stereotypically masculine and feminine characteristics into a balanced whole”. In her discussion, Trites cites Carolyn Heilbrun, who has argued that androgyny suggests

...a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women, be aggressive, as men, tender; it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom.¹⁸

Trites names a number of children’s and/or young adult novelists who have developed “characters who enact power that is not ultimately gender specific”.¹⁹ In portraying female characters whose integrity, success and greatness are driven by courage, adventurousness and physical aggression, all attributes which have been traditionally associated with male characters, Tamora Pierce may rightfully be added to Trites’ list of novelists. Following Trites’ argument, Alanna and Kel would be considered androgynous characters, as in them we see the combination of “both stereotypically masculine and feminine characteristics into a balanced whole”. The idea of androgyny as described by Trites and Heilbrun is a valuable one; after all, it does break the binary, complementary, and dualistic way of thinking about gender and of how the genders can and/or should be. In that sense, the spectrum of possibility that androgyny offers is both positive and useful.

¹⁷ Trites, Roberta Seelinger. *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997, p.25, my italics.

¹⁸ Heilbrun, Carolyn, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*. New York: Knopf, 1973, x-xi. Quoted by Trites, R.S. *Waking Sleeping Beauty*, p.24.

¹⁹ Trites, R.S. *Waking Sleeping Beauty*, p.25.

I do however have reservations concerning androgyny's all-encompassingness, which I think *does* result in a certain degree of desexualising, despite Trites' argument to the contrary. Through its inclusivity and all-encompassingness which produce individuals or characters that are "balanced whole[s]", gender difference and the unique nature of certain gendered experiences, *which do exist*, can be inadvertently lost, or left unacknowledged. I prefer to open up our ideas of what constitutes being female, or the female experience, to include attributes such as courage, aggression, and so on (and of course, attributes traditionally associated with being female, in the male) and to continue to acknowledge gender differences and gendered experience, instead of using inclusive categories such as androgyny.

In her study of popular British children's fiction from 1880 to 1910, Kimberley Reynolds writes about the differences in the gendered story papers *Boy's Own Paper* (published from 1879 to 1967) and *Girl's Own Paper* (1880 to 1956):

BOP's fiction emphasised activity, independence and the triumph of muscle and mind over adverse conditions... *GOP* was primarily concerned with affective relationships and domestic scenarios... boys read about scientific inventions, how to make machines and survival in the tropics, girls were given recipes for furniture and face creams, patterns for needlework...²⁰

²⁰ Reynolds, K. *Girls Only?*, p.139.

Similarly, in her analysis of nineteenth and twentieth century girls' fiction, Deborah O'Keefe discusses the differences between the action stories written for boys, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, and the character or friends-and-family stories, aimed at girls, such as *Little Women*.²¹ According to O'Keefe, boys' adventure stories were focused on heroic individuals' achievement of personal goals (much like the traditional fairy tale hero's quest), while girls' family-and-friends stories were focused on social interaction and relationships.²² Just as Ellen Cronan Rose described girls in fairy tales as "patient, enduring and self-sacrificing", O'Keefe argues that many girl readers have no doubt learned from their reading that females are "bystanders, comforters and sufferers, not the adventurers".²³ Recent texts such as *Lioness and Protector*, however, challenge those tired old stereotypes of female passivity: they contain *both* the so-called "girl" and "boy" elements, presenting stories in which adventure and individual achievement of personal goals are as significant as relationships and social interaction. In *Song of the Lioness and Protector of the Small*, the relationships explored are both "professional" (with mentors, colleagues, superiors, subordinates and adversaries) and "personal" (with family, friends, lovers and again, adversaries). And unlike those tomboy protagonists in previous *bildungsroman* whose inappropriate ambitions tended to be thwarted or diverted toward marriage, Alanna and Kel succeed in achieving their ambitions of becoming knights.

²¹ O'Keefe, Deborah. *Good Girl Messages: How Young Women Were Misled by Their Favorite Books*. New York; London: Continuum, 2000, p.26.

²² O'Keefe, D. *Good Girl Messages*, p.26.

²³ O'Keefe, D. *Good Girl Messages*, p.13

Good Girls are Violent Too: Responsibility in the Young Adult Text

According to the author's website, the publisher's recommended reader age for *Song of the Lioness* and *Protector of the Small* is 10 and up for the first book of each quartet, and 12 and up for the other three books.²⁴ The American Library Association (ALA) defines young adults as "individuals between 12 and 18 years of age".²⁵ Although *young adult* is a category distinct from *children's* literature, the "adult" is negated by the presence of the "young".²⁶ Even though contemporary young adult fiction often features themes and topics which may be considered inappropriate for children's literature – the young adult "problem novel" in particular explores social issues and problems such as drug-use, premarital sex, delinquency and divorce²⁷ – young adult fiction is at its heart didactic.²⁸ Antisocial or negative behaviour must be portrayed *responsibly*, in a pedagogically appropriate way, to contribute to the young reader's development.²⁹ John McKenzie describes "responsible writing" for a young audience as that in which "evil is recognised as evil and doesn't masquerade as good or unduly pleasurable" ("evil", of course, does

²⁴ "Tamora Pierce's Bibliography", at <http://www.tamorapierce.com/books.htm>, accessed 3 March 2005.

²⁵ From the ALA website's "Young Adult" page, <http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=youngadult>, accessed 3 July 2006.

²⁶ In this sense, young adult fiction is not a separate category to children's literature, but a subcategory within children's literature, and in fact, there is often a certain degree of overlap between the two.

²⁷ Fitzgerald, Frances. "The Influence of Anxiety: What's the Problem with Young Adult Novels?" *Harper's Magazine*, vol. 309, issue 1852, 2004. Accessed 3 July 2006. Academic ASAP, Thomson Gale, Murdoch University Library: <http://infotrac.galegroup.com/>.

²⁸ But of course, there are always adults who want to protect their children from exposure to so-called inappropriate subject matter, no matter how responsibly presented. Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl M. Tomlinson suggest that with the rise of books dealing with societal issues such as racism, alcoholism, poverty, divorce, mental illness, and the changing roles of women and men in society, censorship of children's books (the authors include young adult fiction in this) began to increase. "Children's Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?" in *Peabody Journal of Education*, vol. 73, No. 3/4, Literacy Education in the 21st Century, 1998, pp. 235-236.

²⁹ Shavit, Zohar. *Poetics of Children's Literature*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986, pp. 26-27.

not need to be on a grand evil wizard scale, but can include unacceptable behaviour and undesirable values).³⁰

I previously discussed Zohar Shavit's analysis of Roald Dahl's *Danny Champion of the World*, originally a short story written for an adult audience. When the text was rewritten as a children's novel, values and attitudes present in the original version and identified as ambiguous were amended and replaced by more unequivocal representations. The amended version of the story therefore presents for its new young audience "a clear opposition between 'bad' and 'good', and the characterization is of a black-and-white nature".^{31 32} While it could well be pointed out that Alanna's infringement of the rules and use of deception to realise her dream of becoming a knight are examples of "bad" behaviour (rebellion and dishonesty), her suitability as a candidate for knighthood is repeatedly confirmed throughout the texts, vindicating her deception.

³⁰ Nimon, Maureen. "Finding the Acceptable Boundaries: The Challenge in Young Adult Literature." *Orana* August 1998, p.20.

³¹ Shavit, Z. *The Poetics of Children's Literature*, p.59.

³² In her Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling has created a very interesting character in Severus Snape. At the beginning of the series, Snape is clearly portrayed as a "bad" character, with his spiteful treatment of Harry and his friends (who are 'good'), and the biased favour he shows to Draco Malfoy (one of the 'bad'). In the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), Snape is revealed to have been a Death-Eater, one of Voldemort's followers ('bad'), further cementing Harry's (and our) loathing and distrust of him. However, in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), Rowling surprises us by including Snape in the Order ('good'), trusted by Professor Dumbledore (apart from Harry, the paragon of 'good'). But Snape's role in the dramatic confrontation at the climax of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005) has initiated ambivalence and speculation among fans of the series. Is Snape good or bad? Is he *both* good and bad (which leads to much debate – *can he be both good and bad*)? The Harry Potter series is unusual in that it is actively read by both adults as well as children.

Early in *Alanna: The First Adventure*, the twins discontentedly discuss their father's plans for their education. It is clear that neither is well-suited for what has been planned for them:

‘Why do you get all the fun?’ she complained. ‘I’ll have to learn sewing and dancing. You’ll study tilting, fencing –’

‘D’you think I *like* that stuff?’ he yelled. ‘I *hate* falling down and whacking at things! *You’re* the one who likes it, not me!’³³

Before Alanna's servant learns that the twins have switched places, his private thoughts about them confirm that Alanna is obviously a more suitable candidate for knighthood than Thom:

Why couldn't Alanna have been the boy? *She* was a fighter... She learned quickly and well – better than her brother. With all his heart Coram Smythesson wished now, as he had in the past, that Alanna were the boy.³⁴

He thought of Thom's performance in archery – it was enough to make a soldier cry. Alanna was much quicker than her brother. She rarely tired, even hiking over rough country. She had a feel for the fighting arts, and that was something that could never be learned.³⁵

A few pages later, as Alanna and Coram travel to the palace on horseback, Alanna's physical capability and courage are confirmed when Coram's horse is frightened by a snake and she calms it before it can throw him:

³³ Pierce, Tamora. *Alanna: The First Adventure, Song of the Lioness I*. New York: Random House, 1997, p.2.

³⁴ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, pp.11-12.

³⁵ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.15.

Alanna never stopped to think. She threw herself from Chubby's saddle and grabbed for Coram's reins with both hands. Dodging the gelding's flying hooves frantically, she used all her strength and weight to pull the horse down before Coram fell and broke his neck.³⁶

And so, even before Alanna reaches the palace to begin her new life as page Alan, Pierce has emphasised and established Alanna's obvious suitability and eagerness to become a knight, enhanced by Thom's contrasting unsuitability and unwillingness. The fact that girls are not permitted to become knights is portrayed as an injustice based on a tradition of gender inequality. This injustice is given further emphasis by the fact that clearly mismatched and reluctant boys (like Thom) and blatantly dishonourable boys (like Ralon the bully) are accepted into page training without difficulty. Alanna's "crazy idea"³⁷ is perhaps not so crazy after all; certainly, it has been boldly conceived, and its implementation challenging, but Pierce is successful in justifying her protagonist's actions.

In creating two fantasy series featuring knights and battles and wars, Pierce has had to write about violence in *Song of the Lioness* and *Protector of the Small*. Violence, usually seen as "negative" behaviour, is a prominent aspect of both quartets. During their training, and later as knights, both Alanna and Kel are involved directly in violence.

³⁶ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, pp.15-16.

³⁷ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.2.

This is a stark contrast, for example, to how the female protagonists are portrayed in C. S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia series, first published from 1950 to 1956. The problem with the Narnia books, according to O'Keefe, is that Lewis "measured the children... against old standards of gender-appropriate behavior", which meant of course, just like in the Famous Five, boys fought, but girls didn't.³⁸ We must remember, of course, that what O'Keefe calls "old standards" were at that time, *current* standards.

The then-current "girls don't fight" stance is exemplified in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* when Father Christmas gives the children their presents.³⁹ Although they all receive weapons – Peter, a sword and shield, Susan, a bow and arrows, Lucy a small dagger – Father Christmas explicitly tells the girls he does not mean for them to fight in battle. They are to use their weapons only to defend themselves at times of "great need". Father Christmas gives the girls additional non-weapon gifts, apparently more appropriate for females to use: Susan receives a little ivory horn, which she is to blow to summon help, and Lucy receives a bottle of liquid for healing those hurt in battle. Lucy, to her credit, does actually ask Father Christmas why she is not to be in the battle, saying somewhat hesitantly, "I think I could be brave enough". Father Christmas responds to say that the question

³⁸ O'Keefe, D. *Good Girl Messages*, p.182. I touched on this in the previous chapter; in the Famous Five, George was allowed to dress like a boy, cut her hair short like one and insist on being referred to as "George" rather than Georgina, but her male cousins Julian and Dick always prevented George from fighting boys. They also mocked any boys who wanted to fight George, because "boys don't fight girls".

³⁹ Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, from *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia*, Collins, London, 2000, pp.108-109. Just a reminder, that although there are four children in the story, Edmund is not with his siblings when Father Christmas gives out the presents; he is still at the home of the White Witch.

of her bravery ““is not the point””, but more importantly, ““battles are ugly when women fight””.⁴⁰

In *Lioness and Protector*, fighting is part of the life of the page, squire and knight, but Pierce makes it clear that it is ugly whether women *or* men fight. As pages, Alanna and Kel fight against bullies. Alanna, disguised as Alan, is the smallest page of her year; she is beaten regularly by Ralon, who at one stage even breaks her arm. Kel regularly fights three pages who are bullying the younger, smaller boys. As she is outnumbered in these fights, the injuries she sustains must be seen to by a healer. In addition, the group of bullies often targets Kel during weapons practice, viciously attacking her when the instructor is not watching.

Although page Alan’s friends defend him against Ralon, Alanna is determined to defeat Ralon by herself in a fight. She is disadvantaged due to her small stature, and trains in secret, under the guidance of Coram and George Cooper, building up her strength and developing her fighting skills. Her desire to beat Ralon is not based solely on revenge; to her, victory “would mean she had finally earned her place among the boys. It would mean that she could do anything larger and stronger males could”.⁴¹ It is also important for Alanna to “show everyone – including the part of her that was always wondering – that she was as good as any boy in the palace”.⁴²

⁴⁰ Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, pp.108-109.

⁴¹ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.67.

⁴² Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.74.

The final fight between Alan and Ralon is described in detail, clearly conveying the viciousness of it to the reader:

Ralon swung at her, missed, and Alanna came up under his swing to ram into his chest. He yelped and grabbed her hair. She punched him twice in the stomach, hard, ignoring the pain as some hair came out of her scalp. Ralon seized her throat, choking her. She shoved her thumb into his eye, stamping hard on one of his feet at the same time. Ralon screamed in pain, breaking away... She slammed a fist up and under, into his stomach again, knocking the breath from his body. Swiftly she broke his nose with the other hand.⁴³

Although Alanna wins the fight convincingly and Ralon leaves the palace in disgrace, she later confesses to one of her teachers that she threw up afterwards. This is the first of a number of occasions in which Alanna throws up in physical response to fighting or killing.

As a squire, Alanna works as a healer at a battle camp where she is confronted by the horrific pain and wounds suffered by injured and dying warriors. Overcome by all that she has seen, she runs to the back of the tent and throws up: “She struggled to be quiet; she wanted no one to witness her shame. Warriors were not supposed to throw up at the sight of blood and dying”.⁴⁴ She is ashamed, worried that her physical response makes her appear (or confirms that she is) a

⁴³ This quotation forms only part of the description of the fight. Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.76.

⁴⁴ Pierce, T. *In the Hand of the Goddess, Song of the Lioness 2*. New York: Random House, 1997, p.86.

sissy. She does not think that true warriors would react in the way she has. But Alanna's throwing up is certainly not a sign of weakness on her part. Her knight-master Prince Jonathan tells her that he himself threw up after he was involved in his first skirmish.⁴⁵

In *Protector of the Small*, Kel attends a summer training camp with the other pages every year. On the first of these camps, the pages become involved, along with a group of knights, in a hunt for spidrens, immortal beings that have attacked a village and then killed and eaten the villagers. When the pages become separated from the knights and are attacked by the spidrens, Kel and her friends must work together to defend themselves against the ruthless killers. Although they know very well that it is kill or be killed, Kel's best friend Neal is physically sick after killing his first spidren, and later, when the spidrens' nest is set on fire by the knights, Kel herself is compelled to vomit when she hears the sound of the baby spidrens screaming as they burn.⁴⁶

I see the act of vomiting in response to battle and/or killing as the characters' extreme response to the extreme act(s) just performed and/or witnessed, with the most extreme of the acts being the mortal wounding of another being and the taking of another life. Alanna and Kel's physical response to the ultimate act of violence, the kill, expresses not only their revulsion for the act just committed; it signifies their virtue, their goodness – their status as heroines on the side of morality

⁴⁵ Pierce, T. *In the Hand of the Goddess*, p.86.

⁴⁶ Pierce, Tamora. *First Test, Protector of the Small I*. London: Scholastic, 2000, p.207.

and what is ‘good’ (as opposed to ‘evil’). Pierce graphically describes each fighting move, act of wounding and the final death-blows. These descriptions and that of the characters’ physical response of vomiting are intense and *confronting* – they convey the ugliness of violence, even when arguably justified or necessary, such as that in self-defence or as part of a knight’s duties in the time of war. This, for example, is the description of Alanna’s fight with Alex of Tirragen, who has attacked her with the intention of killing her, near the conclusion of the *Lioness* quartet. Alanna’s actively physical and intensely corporeal experience, both in the battle and her reaction afterwards captures just how very different she is to the recalcitrant tomboy girls in texts discussed in previous chapters:

As Alex charged she swung out of the way and kicked again, throwing him against the same spot on the wall. He lunged once more, cross-cutting with a speed she could not dodge, slashing across her cheek and her bare right hand. In the split-second opening in the path of his sword she rammed forward, crushing his windpipe with one fist as she struck his nose with the other, thrusting bone splinters deep into his brain.⁴⁷

Alanna kills Alex with her own trained hands, and the intensity of this hits her as she leaves the scene of the battle:

She hadn’t gone far when her body reacted to the killing: she vomited all over the stair rail for long moments, heaving dryly. She shook with exhaustion.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Pierce, T. *Lioness Rampant, Song of the Lioness 4*. New York: Random House, 1997, p.287.

⁴⁸ Pierce, T. *Lioness Rampant*, p.288.

Pierce carefully and deliberately portrays her protagonists as heroic knights without glorifying the violence that forms a significant part of their lives. Even when Kel wins her first joust against an opponent who has insulted her knight-master's name as well as her own, she does not celebrate when she unhorses him: "She prayed she hadn't killed Ansil, though she was fairly sure she hadn't".⁴⁹

After battle, Pierce focuses not on victory revels, but on recovery, self-reflection, camaraderie and grief. It is also worth noting that only the 'good' characters ever display the extreme physical response of vomiting and a feeling of revulsion toward wounding and killing. The 'evil' characters are not affected in this way – they appear much less troubled by their actions. Pierce has explained the inclusion of violence in her books, on her website:

We must face who we are and what creates violence: helplessness, envy, rage, even the drive to grab the good things of the world that are flaunted in the faces of the poor. We must take responsibility and protect each other from violence. That is why there is violence in my books... I try to walk the balance between showing that we are a violent species and that we must recognize it and deal with it...I want to emphasize heroes, not mindless brutality, and the courage of the kind of people who will say 'Enough. It stops here.' That is why I will continue to include violence in my writing.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Pierce, T. *Squire, Protector of the Small 3*. London: Scholastic, 2001, p.235.

⁵⁰ From the author's website, "Sex and Violence in Tamora Pierce's Books", <http://www.tamorapierce.com/sexnviol.htm>, accessed 24 May 2006.

Pierce's responsible approach to her portrayal of violence is reflected in the advice Maude the healer offers Alanna at the very beginning of *Alanna: The First Adventure*. Maude urges Alanna to look beyond the glory of becoming a knight, to recognise that fighting should not be taken lightly, and to realise that killing has far-reaching consequences. Maude also tells Alanna to make use of her gift of healing, as recompense for the lives she will take as a knight:

‘You see only the glory. But there's lives taken and families without fathers and sorrow. Think before you fight. Think on who you're fighting, if only because one day you must meet your match. And if you want to pay for those lives you do take, use your healing magic’.⁵¹

In becoming knights, Alanna and Kel must become disciplined bodies – they must perfect the physical skills necessary to become knights. They must learn how to joust, the correct way to fall, to master the use of different weapons. They must learn how to use their skills responsibly; they must learn how to follow orders, how to lead others, and how to work as part of a team. In previous chapters I discussed tomboys becoming *self*-disciplined bodies as part of their learning to perform femininity. Jo March learned to control her temper, for example. Laura Ingalls struggled to accept her sunbonnet, and learned to tolerate the discomfort of the corset and to negotiate movement in cumbersome hooped skirts.

Perfecting the physical skills necessary to become knights requires persistence and practice, and to succeed, Alanna and Kel must become *self*-

⁵¹ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, pp.8-9.

disciplined bodies too. Here, Alanna and Kel demonstrate the value of hard work, determination and never giving up. While they are heroic, Alanna and Kel are certainly not superheroes. After losing her first swordfight and discovering that she is not a natural with the sword, Alanna is determined to master it. She begins practicing daily using Coram's sword which is too big for her to handle comfortably, knowing that mastering it will enhance her skills as well as build up her strength. When Ralon breaks her sword arm, she learns to wield her weapon in her other hand, seeing the advantage in her misfortune: "She quickly saw that she could be twice as effective using both hands, and worked as hard as she could to develop her skill".⁵² Her ambidexterity proves essential later in the series whenever either of her arms is injured during a battle. In *Protector of the Small*, Kel discovers by accident that her practice lance has been weighted with lead without her knowledge. She chooses to continue training with the extra weight in her lance, realising that doing so will only make her arms stronger.

The New Fantasy *Bildungsroman*

With one of its central themes being the triumph of good over evil, the fantasy text is an ideal vehicle for educating the young reader, giving authors the ability "to write about the conflict between good and evil without sounding didactic".⁵³ Johansen asserts that the didactic power of fantasy (and therefore, its value for young people) lies in the ideals it presents:

⁵² Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.68.

⁵³ Sharyn November, senior editor of Puffin Books and Viking Children's Books, quoted in Lodge, Sally. "Beyond the Wizard's Wand: A Look at the Growing Field of Fantasy Books for Children." *Publishers Weekly* 36, no. 4, 2003. Accessed 4 July 2006. Academic ASAP, Thomson Gale,

The ability to choose between right and wrong, to aim for what is good rather than what is expedient, to consider actions and consequences rather than blindly following the choices made by those around us because that is easier...⁵⁴

Roger Sutton, editor of *The Horn Book*, has suggested that because of adults' desire to provide guidance and communicate good values to the next generation, didacticism finds its way into all literature for young people. According to him, adults just "can't help it".⁵⁵ Brown and St. Clair suggest that because storytellers have long acted as agents of socialization and have played a significant role in the transmission of cultural values, female protagonists have reflected the expectations of women during the times in which their stories were written, teaching girls their proper "place".⁵⁶ This is why those past stories and series of development began with exuberant and wilful girls like Jo March and Laura Ingalls, but ended with the then conventional and expected (for us now, perhaps, unsatisfying) outcomes: maturity, conformity and femininity, which equaled passivity, domesticity, marriage and motherhood, what Elaine Showalter has called "capitulation to the

Murdoch University Library: <http://infotrac.galegroup.com/>. And the move away from *obvious* didacticism can be further seen in the rise of chick lit books for young adults, which "explore the lives of ordinary girls who, unburdened by terrible issues or secret tragedies, do their best to navigate high school life" – see Alderdice, Kit. "Chick Lit for Teens and Tweens: A Breakout Category for Adults Proves Successful for Younger Readers as Well." *Publishers Weekly* 24, no. 3, 2004. Accessed 3 July, 2006. <http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA480067&display=display>.

⁵⁴ Johansen, K.V. "Children's Fantasy: What and Why?" *Resource Links* 7, no. 1, 2001, p.29. Accessed 1 July 2006. Academic ASAP, Thomson Gale, Murdoch University Library: <http://infotrac.galegroup.com/>.

⁵⁵ Frances FitzGerald "The Influence of Anxiety: What's the Problem with Young Adult Novels?" *Harper's Magazine* vol. 309, issue 1852, 2004. Accessed 3 July 2006. Academic ASAP, Thomson Gale, Murdoch University Library: <http://infotrac.galegroup.com/>.

⁵⁶ Brown, J. and N. St. Clair, *Declarations of Independence*, p.2.

dominant culture's image of feminine propriety",⁵⁷ and what Deborah O'Keefe refers to as the "cop-out pattern", where "a young girl starts out lively and active but ends up ladylike and docile".⁵⁸

Scholars have argued that the "novel of development" is different for the female protagonist compared with that of the default male protagonist. Abel, Hirsch and Langland suggest that "while male protagonists struggle to find a hospitable context in which to realize their aspirations, female protagonists must frequently struggle to voice any aspirations whatsoever".⁵⁹ Susan Rosowski argues that for the female protagonist, development brings about an awakening: an awareness and coming to terms with the limitations she faces because of her gender.⁶⁰ This is certainly true for Jo March and Laura Ingalls. Of course, it must be noted that although their endings follow O'Keefe's cop-out pattern, *Little Women* and the *Little House* series do explore the ambivalence of their female protagonists, showing that the process of development and awakening, though inevitable, is by no means easy. This ambivalence is also noted by Abel, Hirsch and Langland, who suggest that "[t]he tensions that shape female development may lead to a disjunction between a surface plot, which affirms social conventions, and a

⁵⁷ Showalter, Elaine. "Little Women: The American Female Myth" in *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press. 1991, p.43.

⁵⁸ O'Keefe, D. *Good Girl Messages*, p.13.

⁵⁹ Abel, Elizabeth, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland, eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, pp.6-7 [Editors' Introduction].

⁶⁰ Rosowski, Susan. "The Novel of Awakening" in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, p.49.

submerged plot, which encodes rebellion”.⁶¹ But of course, in the traditional female *bildungsroman*, rebellion is a temporary phase, conquered and tamed by convention.

Brown and St. Clair suggest that the pattern which characterises Jo March’s experience as a girl is: “discover first what society expects of you [i.e. the limitations] and then learn to enact the behavior”.⁶² Lioness and Protector are different to the traditional female *bildungsroman* in that the stories *begin* with Alanna and Kel’s understanding of gendered limitations and expectations – which they *then* choose to defy any way. For them, maturity does not bring about acceptance that they can never realise their girlhood dreams, but rather, the achievement of those very dreams.

There might be a temptation to suggest that Lioness and Protector really *are* male *bildungsroman* featuring female heroes, or to do as Lissa Paul probably would, which is regard Alanna and Kel as female heroes with male characteristics (*They rescue! They battle! They conquer! They kill!* And the clincher: *They are courageous!*), but I argue instead that the Lioness and Protector quartets are examples of the *evolved* female *bildungsroman*, with Alanna and Kel examples of its evolved young female protagonist. Brown and St. Clair suggest that texts written for the education of a young female audience (they cite the example of English sentimental novels of the 18th century) “provide a fascinating map or record of

⁶¹ Able, Elizabeth, Marianne Hirsch, Elizabeth Langland. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, p.12 [Editors’ Introduction].

⁶² Brown, J. and N. St. Clair, *Declarations of Independence*, p.180, my parentheses.

cultural conflicts, embodying ideological tensions about what their readers were supposed to learn about ‘being a girl’”.⁶³ I would also add to this by suggesting that *all* literature for a young audience, children and young adult, *still* does this, including Lioness and Protector quartets. What has changed is what “being a girl” now encompasses.

Being of the fantasy genre, Lioness and Protector can be selectively mimetic, unlike realistic fiction, which must conform to the circumstances, conventions and logic of the recognizable world, and as a result can be surprisingly limited in available plot lines.^{64 65} As I suggested in the first chapter of this thesis, although Louisa May Alcott depicted the ambivalence of Jo March, she had little choice in how to depict Jo’s fate in her realistic story – in her time, it was simply not appropriate to end a realistic story for girls with its young heroine living an independent life as an artist. Marriage was the acceptable and expected outcome, and spinsterhood was not a desirable alternative. Alcott wrote pityingly of spinsterhood, embodying the negativity associated with the figure of the spinster (and the insinuation that there was something intrinsically wrong or deficient in the

⁶³ Brown, J. and N. St. Clair, *Declarations of Independence*, p.3.

⁶⁴ Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of Fantasy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, p.92.

⁶⁵ Similarly, in *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, Vladimir Propp identified thirty-one generic “functions” or narrative structures in the Russian folk tale (see Chapter III, “The Functions of Dramatis Personae”, pp.25-65 for a detailed explanation of the thirty-one structures). Propp also argues that there are certain “spheres of action” which join the “functions” together, present via certain character types: the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess and her father, the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero (see Chapter VI “The Distribution of Functions Among Dramatis Personae”, pp.79-83). Propp also suggests that “[e]ach category of characters has its own form of appearing”. The villain, for example, appears twice during the course of the action, while the donor is usually encountered accidentally, most often in a hut in the forest, or else in a field, p.84. Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Translated by Laurence Scott with an Introduction by Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson (First edition). Second ed. Revised and Edited with a Preface by Louis A. Wagner/New Introduction by Alan Dundes. Austin; London: University of Indiana Press, 1975.

woman who became a spinster) in the thoroughly unlikable character of Croaker. For Laura Ingalls, as it was for her Ma, teaching was a temporary profession that merely filled in the time between childhood and marriage. Wilder's Little House series was autobiographically-based and reflected the author's real life story of development – there was not much else for both real and fictional Laura to aspire to, besides becoming a wife, O'Keefe's cop-out: "Following her destiny, a girl was allowed only a few actions: she could *accept* a suitor, take subtle measures to *attract* a suitor, perhaps *select* from a group of suitors. Once the selection stage was passed, she could *help* him and she could *suffer* for him".⁶⁶ The story of *These Happy Golden Years* details that suitor process, leading up to marriage, and *The First Four Years* tells of the hardships experienced by Laura and Almanzo in the first four years of that marriage – Laura *helps* her husband and *suffers* for (and with) him, unquestioningly supporting his farming ventures. In Protector of the Small, Kel chooses knighthood over marriage, but there is no suggestion that there is anything 'wrong' with her for making that decision; she is, instead, portrayed as dedicated and focused. I will discuss the issue of marriage in the next section of this chapter.

The contemporary fantasy female *bildungsroman* offers not only an escape from the real world and its limited range of 'proper' destinies; it can also function as a critique and an alternative to the real world, presenting worlds with more

⁶⁶ O'Keefe, D. *Good Girl Messages*, p.143. Of course, we do know that Laura Ingalls Wilder did end up more than a wife and mother, she also became a famous and successful writer of books for children.

expansive possibilities for selfhood.⁶⁷ Having created the fantasy world featured in her books, Pierce can allow her characters to resist and subvert its gender conventions, which she has also created. Pierce has chosen to base the social structure of Tortall on feudal society, where class and gender distinctions play a significant role. When we meet ten-year-old Alanna and her twin brother Thom in *Alanna: The First Adventure*, they are both acutely aware of the gendered conventions for the education of noble children – *their* education:

All girls from noble families studied in convents until they were fifteen or sixteen, at which time they went to Court to find husbands. Usually the oldest son of a noble family learned the skills and duties of a knight at the King's palace. Younger sons could follow their brothers to the palace, or they could go first to the convent, then to the priests' cloisters, where they studied religion or sorcery.⁶⁸

The twins' father plans to send Thom to the royal palace to begin his knight training and Alanna to the convent, but both twins are not happy with this. Not the stereotypical swashbuckling boy, Thom detests fighting and physical activity and has no desire to become a knight; he wants to be a sorcerer, not a warrior. Alanna wants to become the first female knight in over a century. The traditional female *bildungsroman* would have depicted Alanna learning to accept that girls grow up to become ladies, not knights, and she would have gained a husband rather than a shield at the end of the series (Alanna actually gains a shield *as well as* a husband). But in her fantasy *bildungsroman*, girls can actually become knights, and Pierce

⁶⁷ Brown, J. and N. St. Clair, *Declarations of Independence*, p.128.

⁶⁸ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.7.

allows her female protagonist to devise a plan to circumvent her father's plans and to fulfill her 'inappropriate' ambition.

Distinctly Female Stories of Development

I have argued that despite including many "boy" story elements, the *Song of the Lioness* and *Protector of the Small* present distinctly female stories of development. Pierce achieves this by directly exploring a number of issues related to the experience of growing up female, which I will examine now, beginning with gender discrimination.

In *Song of the Lioness*, gender inequality is at the core of Alanna's story; the only way that she, a girl, can be admitted into knight training, is not to be a girl at all – she must pretend to be a boy. Perhaps not surprisingly, Alanna sees her femaleness as a hindrance, a handicap that she must conceal and overcome in order to become a knight. In fact, she tries her best to *abandon* her femaleness for at least eight years, though unfortunately for her puberty makes its appearance (I will discuss puberty a little later in this section). A significant part of Alanna's development is in her learning to defeat *her own* internalised prejudices about her gender, to realise that she can be female *and* be respected as a warrior and knight.

As a page, Alanna, having come off second-best in a fight with Ralon reproaches herself: "This wouldn't have happened to a real boy".⁶⁹ She is so focused on seeing her femaleness as her weakness that she forgets the obvious and

⁶⁹ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.62.

correct reason as to why Ralon is picking on page Alan: Ralon is bigger and stronger than Alan, who is the smallest page of his year. Alanna did not lose the fight because she is a girl; she lost the fight because she is physically smaller than Ralon and as yet has not developed the fighting skills necessary to defeat a larger, stronger opponent. And weeks later, after training in secret, Alanna does defeat Ralon, humiliating him before the other pages, proving that it never was her gender that caused her to be bullied or to lose the earlier fights.

Alanna believes that her friends will hate her once they have found out the truth about her sex. She tells George, with whom she has shared her secret: ““But I’m a girl... I’m lying to them. I’m doing men’s things””. George points out something that the readers have already noticed which Alanna herself seems blind to – that she does “men’s things” better than most young men.⁷⁰

With her time as a page nearing its end, Alanna does not think Prince Jonathan will choose her as his squire, even though that is what she wants more than anything else. Even though the other pages reassure page Alan that he is ““the best on horseback... best at archery and tilting and staff fighting and weapons””, Alanna “didn’t feel worthy of being someone’s squire. She was a girl, and she was a liar”.⁷¹ Alanna finally overcomes her self-doubt when she and Prince Jonathan fight against the Ysandir in the Black City. The Ysandir use magic to strip Alanna’s clothes away from her, exposing her female body. When they laugh at Alanna and

⁷⁰ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.139.

⁷¹ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p 172.

taunt her for being a girl, she shouts back, “I may be a girl, but I can defend – or attack! – as well as any boy!”⁷² The Ysandir then direct their jeering at Jonathan, telling him: “She is a girl. She is weak. She will give way, and where will you be?”⁷³ This fills Alanna with an anger and passion that gives her a powerful new strength and self-confidence, and together, she and Jonathan defeat the Ysandir, working together as a team, using both sorcery and sword. This victory, along with Jonathan’s straightforward acceptance of her femaleness gives her a new sense of self-belief, and at the end of *The First Adventure*, not only is she able to voice her desire to become Jonathan’s squire, she presents a convincing argument to him as to why she is the best choice over the other pages. But Jonathan doesn’t need convincing, telling her: “I’m glad you agree with my reasons... Girl, boy or dancing-bear, you’re the finest squire-to-be at Court”⁷⁴.

While Alanna battles her own preconceptions about her gender, in *Protector of the Small*, Kel must battle the prejudice of others. In *First Test*, even before the character of Kel makes her first appearance, we are made to realise that the royal decree permitting girls to train to be knights has done little to change the attitudes of some people – the first of which is Lord Wyldon, the pages’ training master. Lord Wyldon believes that girls should not become knights, that females should not be warriors. During a meeting with the King and Lady Knight Alanna, he argues: “Girls are fragile, more emotional, easier to frighten. They are not as strong in their

⁷² Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.201.

⁷³ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.201.

⁷⁴ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.215.

arms and shoulders as men. They tire easily”.”⁷⁵ This is, obviously, a ridiculous generalisation, as already proven by Alanna’s success. As training master, Wyldon insists that while Kel may come to the palace to train, she must complete a year of probation – to prove that she can be as good as the boys – before he will consider formally accepting her as a page. Even Kel recognises the gross unfairness of this – no one has ever been made to complete a probationary year before.⁷⁶

Upon her arrival at the palace, Kel is targeted by pages who resent her presence. She finds that her room has been vandalised with unwelcoming messages: “No Girls!”, “Go Home!” “You Won’t Last!”⁷⁷ But Pierce does not allow Kel to be discouraged or intimidated by this; in fact, it makes her even more determined to succeed *as a girl*.

Before she had seen her room, she had planned to wear tunic and breeches as she had for the journey. She’d thought that if she was to train as a boy, she ought to dress like one. ...Now she felt differently. She was a girl; she had nothing to be ashamed of, and they had better learn *that* straight away. The best way to remind them was to dress at least part of the time as a girl.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Pierce, T. *First Test*, p.4.

⁷⁶ In *Tamora Pierce (Who Wrote That?)*, Donna Dailey reveals: “Originally, Pierce had envisioned Kel’s story to be written as a trilogy: *Page*, *Squire* and *Lady Knight*. At the time of writing the series, her publishers restricted the length of her books to 200 manuscript pages, thinking that children would not want to read anything longer”, p.106. However, in writing about the many problems faced by Kel because she was known to be a girl, “By the time she got to page 180, [Pierce] had not finished Kel’s first year”. Rather than discarding the extra material, Pierce and her husband came up with the idea of a probation year, thus making the series into a quartet, p.108.

⁷⁷ Pierce, T. *First Test*, p.28.

⁷⁸ Pierce, T. *First Test*, p.29.

Those who oppose Kel being at the palace continue to make their feelings clear. Spiteful pranks are played on her: a mud bath is dumped on top of her, oil is deliberately poured outside her door so that she may slip in it, and in a gesture of utter contempt, someone urinates at the doorway of her room. During weapons training, one of the boys, Zahir, tells Kel: ““A woman out of her place is a distraction to men!”” He strikes her repeatedly with his staff until she is forced to kick him in the stomach to make him stop. Some of the other boys stand around Kel while this is going on to prevent their supervisor to see what is happening.⁷⁹ This is, of course, very different to how Alanna is treated as a page. Disguised as a boy, Alanna enjoys the privilege of being male; although she is bullied by Ralon and his cronies, it is Alan the smallest boy that is targeted, not Alanna the girl. Not all of those who oppose Kel resort to trickery or assault to express their disdain for her. In *Page*, for example, the noble guests she is assigned to serve at a formal palace dinner are not afraid to voice their disapproval of her, one directly addressing Kel: ““My advice to you, lass, is to go home and hope your parents can make a proper marriage for you... Ladies have no place bearing arms””.⁸⁰ These guests even refuse to be served by her, demanding a more suitable (male) page.⁸¹

When Wyldon learns of Kel’s fear of heights, he takes every opportunity to target it. During the pages’ summer camp, he makes Kel climb a tree every day, forcing her to confront her fear. Whenever any sort of punishment is to be given to Kel, Wyldon ensures it is something related to heights. Kel’s friend Neal is

⁷⁹ Pierce, T. *First Test*, p.150.

⁸⁰ Pierce, T. *Page*. London: Scholastic, 2000, p.73.

⁸¹ Pierce, T. *Page*, p.73.

convinced that Wyldon is trying to make Kel quit (and the reader might well be inclined to agree, knowing of Wyldon's stance against female knights), but Kel refuses to be put off by Wyldon's punishments. Instead, she chooses to regard them as Wyldon's way of teaching her how to work through her fear, helping her to become a better knight by forcing her to manage her fear. While this may not have been Wyldon's original intention (I tend to agree with cynical Neal), it is certainly what happens.

After Kel has completed her probation year, Wyldon decides to allow Kel to return officially as a page. Although she has proven her ability to (supposedly) keep up with the other pages, and even though she has demonstrated superior leadership skills during the pages' training camp, because she is female, Wyldon is still not convinced that Kel should become a knight. He urges her to consider her future:

‘Soon your body will change. The things that you will want from life as a maiden will change. Pursue the course you have, and you might be crippled by an accident... What if you should fall in love? What if you came to grief, or caused others to do so, because your thoughts were on your heart, rather than on combat?’

Wyldon still believes that Kel's desire to become a knight is a misguided one. He cannot see that the questions he asks of Kel could well be applied to a male page, who could just as easily be crippled by accident, fall in love, come to grief or cause others to do so. He assumes that as a female, Kel will be more inclined than any of the male pages, to put love before duty. He assumes that Kel's desire to be a knight

will change, because more appropriate “female” desires will come naturally with maturity (the equivalent of the temporary phase of tomboyishness being replaced with acceptance of femininity). Later, in *Squire*, one of Kel’s year-mates named Joren questions her reasons for wanting to be a knight. He refuses to accept Kel’s own admission that she may not actually want to get married, telling her condescendingly that “all women care about marriage”. He asks her: “Why do any of this? ...It isn’t at all needful. Did someone tell you that you had no chance to marry?” He warns Kel of what could happen to her, sounding very much like Wyldon: “One battle too many, and you’ll be scarred for life. No man will want you then”.⁸² Wyldon and Joren are examples of males in the series who regard women’s lives as defined by marriage, which by their understanding would be placed in unnecessary jeopardy by the misguided pursuit of knighthood.

Joren turns out to be one of Kel’s worst enemies over the course of the series. Not long after Kel has started her time as a probationer, he taunts and attacks her during staff practice, repeatedly trying to smash her ribs with his staff.⁸³ He and his friends fight Kel when she tries to make them stop bullying the younger pages. He attacks her when she is alone during the pages’ training camp, lunging at her and wrapping his arm around her throat.⁸⁴ He is prepared to go to great lengths to thwart her success. On the day of the pages’ final examination which Kel must pass if she is to be made a squire, Joren arranges for Kel’s maid to be kidnapped, knowing that Kel will look for her and miss the examination. He shows no remorse

⁸² Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.179.

⁸³ Pierce, T. *First Test*, pp.56-58.

⁸⁴ Pierce, T. *First Test*, p.181.

when he is revealed more than a year later as the person who arranged the kidnapping declaring to the court room: ““What honour has a nation when a female lives among men and pretends to their profession of arms?””.⁸⁵ After his friend Vinson is arrested on charges of assault and rape, Joren threatens Kel: ““Once I’m a knight, you’d best keep an eye behind you, bitch. ...I’ll be in your shadow, until one day you won’t cast one ever again””.⁸⁶ But Joren never becomes a knight; in fact, Joren and Vinson (Protector) and Ralon (Lioness) never become knights or heroes. Ralon leaves the palace in shame after Alanna defeats him in a fight in *The First Adventure*; in *Squire*, Vinson emerges from his Ordeal of Knighthood confessing to the attack and rape of three girls and is subsequently arrested without being made a knight; Joren is dealt the ultimate punishment – he dies in the Chamber during his Ordeal. By not permitting these three characters to become knights, Pierce makes a clear statement of her disapproval of them: their actions and attitudes are unacceptable and unsanctioned, and none of them are worthy of becoming knights.

In *Squire*, Greystreak, the centaur chief, sees Kel not as a squire but as a woman – a tradeable commodity and a breeder. He offers Lord Raoul (assuming that as a male and the commander of the group, Raoul holds the right of Kel’s ownership) three horses in trade for Kel, with a bonus of two more ““if she breeds successfully within a year””.⁸⁷ When Kel seeks her mother’s advice concerning

⁸⁵ Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.154.

⁸⁶ Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.268.

⁸⁷ Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.54. Lord Raoul tells Greystreak that human females are not for sale, and that Kel is a squire.

lovers and pregnancy, Ilane's description of her own father's attitudes towards her marriage are strangely reminiscent of the centaur chief's: "I overheard him once describing me to a potential suitor. Even though I had small breasts, he said, my hips were big enough that I should foal with ease. It would be easy to find a milk nurse once I dropped a healthy son".⁸⁸ But of course, Kel's story, her desires and achievements demonstrate that there is much more to being female than marriage and breeding.

As a squire, Kel is challenged by knights to joust. According to Lord Raoul, these challenges are motivated by prejudicial attitudes: "They want to prove you're not as good as the lads". Kel is an excellent jouster, but deliberately makes sure she wins only two out of every three matches (although she sometimes does lose legitimately!), because even though she hates to lose, she knows that if she wins too many jousts, the people opposed to her will only say that someone used magic on her behalf.⁸⁹ This way, she still appears competent, and "as good as" at least *most* of "the lads".

While there are clearly many males who are resistant to the idea of female knights, throughout *Song of the Lioness and Protector of the Small*, Pierce also portrays male characters who are positive, accepting and supportive. Alanna and Kel form important relationships with these male characters, on both professional and personal levels.

⁸⁸ Pierce, T. *Squire*, pp.224-225.

⁸⁹ Pierce, T. *Squire*, pp.250-251. It is for a similar reason that Lady Knight Alanna is not permitted to make contact with Kel during her training.

For Alanna, for example, Coram is more than a servant; when she begins her training at the palace, he is the only person who knows her secret. He is supportive of her, willingly working with her to improve her hand combat and sword fighting skills. He lets her practice her sword-handling skills using his very own sword. He fetches raw steak to put on her black eye after a fight with Ralon. But perhaps even most importantly, he constantly encourages her, showing great belief in her even when she doubts herself, assuring her: ““Ye can be a woman and still be a warrior””.⁹⁰

The first friend Alanna makes disguised as Alan is George Cooper. George helps Alan train for his big fight with Ralon, and facilitates Alan’s purchase of his horse, Moonlight. After finding out Alanna’s secret, George is still supportive and encouraging of her, never once questioning her desire to become a knight. George is a commoner, and Alanna finds that “sometimes it was pleasant to just *be* with George, to relax and to forget about being a noble, about the Ordeal, about being a girl fighting to win a knight’s shield. George let her be who she was”.⁹¹

While Alanna fears that her friends at the palace – Alan’s friends – will hate her when they find out the truth, she is proven wrong, beginning with Prince Jonathan, who chooses her to be his squire, and Gary, who helps her learn to look upon her secret with humour.⁹² And Sir Myles, one of the pages’ instructors, is a friend and confidante to Alan, even after secretly suspecting that Alan is really a

⁹⁰ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.106.

⁹¹ Pierce, T. *In the Hand of the Goddess*, p.44.

⁹² Pierce, T. *In the Hand of the Goddess*, p.173.

girl in disguise. After the death of her own father later in the series, Sir Myles becomes Alanna's adopted father – giving her the love, encouragement and support she never received from her real father. These are only some of the significant and rewarding relationships Alanna forms with male characters; these relationships are important because they demonstrate that in a world (in this case, a fantasy one, and by projection, the reader's own world) where gender discrimination and prejudice exists, relationships based on mutual respect and trust between males and females can flourish.

In the same way, in *Protector of the Small*, not all male characters are against Kel; in fact, she has a great many male friends and supporters. The trust, respect and loyalty Kel is able to inspire in others in the male-dominated environments she finds herself in are important to her success in leadership roles as a page and as a commander when she becomes a knight.

When Kel is attacked by Zahir during weapons practice, Kel's friends, including her best friend Neal, do not hesitate come to her aid.⁹³ When they learn of her nightly fights against the bullies, Kel's friends accompany her; outnumbered, the bullies are forced to stop.⁹⁴ Kel's friends are always vocal in their support of her. They cheer loudly when she hits the target during jousting practice for the first time, after weeks of failed attempts.⁹⁵ Two of the younger pages even ask for Kel's help in the use of the staff, and come to her room regularly for instruction and

⁹³ Pierce, T. *First Test*, p.150.

⁹⁴ Pierce, T. *First Test*, pp.158-159.

⁹⁵ Pierce, T. *First Test*, pp.168.

practice.⁹⁶ After surviving the attack of hill bandits during their second summer camp, Kel's friends tell Wyldon the truth about what took place: that Kel took command of their group when the senior page that was in charge froze under the pressure of the situation.⁹⁷ When Kel misses the pages' final examination, her friends are noticeably upset that she might be forced to repeat her page training as punishment; her friend Owen even cries openly at dinner.⁹⁸

Lord Raoul takes Kel on as his squire, having been impressed by her performance on the spidren hunt as a probationer and her role in the battle against hill bandits as a page. When Kel is still a page, Lord Raoul encourages Kel, speaking to her "as he might to a noble his age"⁹⁹ and making it plain "he thought her talented".¹⁰⁰ And in *Squire*, when Kel is sent by her new knight-master to select her equipment under the supervision of one of his officers,

Kel realized an important moment in her life had come and gone as she chose a riding saddle and inspected shields. For the first time a warrior had thoroughly tested her knowledge of equipment, and she had passed. Qasim had rejected none of her choices. It was all the more startling to Kel because he'd done it in such a matter-of-fact, commonplace way... Today she'd dealt with two men who took her on her own terms.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Pierce, T. *Page*, pp.164-168.

⁹⁷ Pierce, T. *Page*, pp.118.

⁹⁸ Pierce, T. *Page*, p.246.

⁹⁹ Pierce, T. *Page*, p.156

¹⁰⁰ Pierce, T. *Page*, p.157.

¹⁰¹ Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.35.

Lord Raoul recognises Kel's natural talent as a leader, and trains her to be a commander. He encourages her to test her skills by competing in the jousting competitions, discusses jousting tactics with her, and even bets on her to win, publicly displaying his confidence in his squire. After he almost walks in on Kel and Cleon kissing in her tent, Raoul has a private talk with Kel about the issue of relationships with colleagues. He tells her about relationships within the Riders, another of Tortall's armed forces, to underline the double standards that women have to face, and which he wants Kel to be aware of:

'Men who join the Riders are able to fight alongside females, or they don't last. But what the women say is that if they take Rider men as lovers, and it's found out, they encounter trouble. Men who dislike their orders offer to work it out in bed. Jealousies spring up, particularly if the woman and the man are in the same Rider Group. If the woman is in command and the man isn't, they're both mocked by other men, and the woman gets treated like a trollop... It's more complicated for the women. It's not fair, but I think you already know the world isn't'.¹⁰²

Kel reflects on Raoul's words, appreciating his concern:

How many knight-masters would have done this differently, even hurtfully? How many would have said nothing until Kel was so deeply in a mess that she would never get out of it? Only Raoul would treat it as a lesson in the intricacies of command.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.222.

¹⁰³ Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.223.

At the beginning of the series, Lord Wyldon is firmly against Kel's entry into knight training, but by the end of *Page* when Kel is made a squire, he acknowledges her accomplishment with grace, congratulating her and telling her that she has ““proved me wrong on every count””.¹⁰⁴ In *Lady Knight*, with the war with Scanra gaining momentum, Wyldon appoints Kel as the commander of a refugee camp. Initially, Kel thinks that Wyldon is just trying to keep her out of combat, but he assures her that she will definitely see combat, as there will be no safe zones in the war. He has chosen her for the post because she has been trained to command,¹⁰⁵ but more importantly, she is the only one he trusts to do the job properly. Wyldon has noticed Kel's respect and consideration for commoners, which is rare among nobles.¹⁰⁶ The commander of the camp will have to supervise the refugees, who will be commoners, and there will also be convict-soldiers as well as other knights to manage.

Kel's friends continue to support her when they are knights. When Kel defies Wyldon's orders and sneaks away to track down the refugees who have been taken from the camp by the enemy, her friends do not hesitate to go after her and help her, despite knowing that Kel could be charged with desertion, and they may also be charged for assisting her. Owen, who is Wyldon's personal squire, risks his own knighthood by also going after Kel:

The thought of his knight-master's wrath didn't upset Owen, although he knew he'd destroyed his own name and his chance to become a knight.

¹⁰⁴ Pierce, T. *Page*, p.251.

¹⁰⁵ Pierce, T. *Lady Knight*. London: Scholastic, 2002, p.64.

¹⁰⁶ Pierce, T. *Lady Knight*, p.69.

Wyldon's disappointment in him would cut far deeper, but there was no choice. Kel needed an army to get her people back.¹⁰⁷

Although in their respective series Alanna and Kel are unusual in their desire to become knights, they are by no means the only strong and physically capable female warriors in their respective series. Pierce features other strong female characters who challenge the traditional masculine/active-feminine/passive binary. In *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*, Alanna rescues Princess Thayet, who later becomes King Jonathan's wife. Thayet is not only "the most beautiful female Alanna has ever seen"¹⁰⁸, she is a capable rider and excellent archer. Thayet's personal guard is Buri, who is also a highly skilled rider and archer. She reappears in *Protector of the Small* as a commander of the Riders, and is greatly admired by Kel. In the final battle of *Lioness Rampant* King Jonathan is saved from being killed by enemy archers through the courageous efforts of four women: Thayet, Buri, Eleni (George's mother) and Rispah (Coram's partner).^{109 110} In *Protector of the Small*, in *Squire*, Prince Roald's arranged bride-to-be, Princess Shinkokami, surprises and impresses him (as well as the other squires) with her knowledge of battle strategy, supply problems and tracking.¹¹¹

The very first woman warrior in Kel's life is her own mother, Ilane. Before she departs for the palace to begin her training, Kel has a vivid and violent dream in

¹⁰⁷ Pierce, T. *Lady Knight*, p.266.

¹⁰⁸ Pierce, T. *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*. New York: Random House, 1997, p.73.

¹⁰⁹ Pierce, T. *Lioness Rampant*, p.295.

¹¹⁰ The other Tortallan books also feature strong women, including many of the women who appear in *Song of the Lioness* and *Protector of the Small*.

¹¹¹ Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.179.

which her mother fights and kills four attacking men. This dream does not upset Kel; rather, it excites and energises her:

Kel woke, breathing fast, her eyes shining. Her heart raced; she trembled all over. The dream was not scary; it was exciting. She loved it. She loved that it had all been real. ...I want to be like that, she told herself as she always did. I want to protect people. And I will. I will. I'll be a hero one day, just like Mama. Just like the Lioness.¹¹²

Later in *First Test*, it is revealed that Kel's dream was of an event that actually took place.¹¹³ Ilane single-handedly defended sacred treasures from theft by invading pirates, killing several of them before help finally arrived. Not surprisingly, being a highly-skilled warrior herself, Kel's mother is completely supportive of her daughter's ambition to become a knight and is proud of her achievements.¹¹⁴ Kel and Ilane are very close; Kel consults her mother for advice on personal matters such as lovers, pregnancy, menstrual periods and breasts, which leads me to another aspect of growing up female which Pierce writes about in *Lioness and Protector*. Largely ignored in the *bildungsroman* previous discussed in this thesis (no doubt considered inappropriate subject matter for a young audience): the changes to her protagonists' bodies as they mature.

Alanna is dismayed and horrified by her changing body, as it threatens to expose her hidden femaleness to the world. It also makes it more difficult for her to

¹¹² Pierce, T. *First Test*, p.23.

¹¹³ Pierce, T. *First Test*, p.177.

¹¹⁴ Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.178.

continue denying her femaleness to herself. As she frantically binds her chest with bandages to hide her developing breasts, she refuses to admit to Coram that she is ““turning into a woman””. He urges her to accept who and what she is:

‘Lass, ye’ve got to accept who ye are,’ he protested. ‘Ye can be a woman and still be a warrior.’

‘I hate it!’ she yelled, losing her temper. ‘People will think I’m soft and silly!’

‘Ye’ll hardly soft,’ he replied sharply. ‘And th’ only time ye’re silly is when we talk like this... Alanna, child, ye’ll be happy only when ye learn t’live with who ye are’.¹¹⁵

Alanna thinks that being female is inferior to being male, of female as soft and silly. In the Famous Five series, for tomboy George, to be like a girl is to be weak and inferior to boys. George wants to be a boy – as far as possible from being someone soft and silly like her feminine cousin Anne.

Alanna is frightened when she awakes one morning to find blood on her sheets. Not knowing about menstruation, she seeks the help of George to find a healer, revealing to him that she is a girl. George brings Alanna to his mother, who is a healer. Mistress Cooper explains that menstruation is normal and related to pregnancy, and that pregnancy can be easily avoided. And just as Coram advised Alanna to accept who she is, Mistress Cooper offers similar counsel:

‘How long do I have to put up with this?’ Alanna gritted.

¹¹⁵ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, pp.106-107.

‘Until you are too old to bear children. It’s as normal as the full moon is, and it happens just as often. You may as well get used to it.’

‘No!’ Alanna cried, jumping to her feet. ‘I won’t let it!’

Again Mistress Cooper raised her eyebrows. ‘You’re female, child, no matter what clothing you wear.’¹¹⁶ You must become accustomed to that.’

‘Why?’ Alanna demanded. ‘I have the Gift. I’ll change it! I’ll –’

‘Nonsense!’ the woman snapped. ‘You cannot use your Gift to change what the gods have willed for you, and you would be foolish to try! The gods willed you to be female and small and redheaded, and obviously silly as well...’¹¹⁷

Mistress Cooper goes on to tell Alanna: “‘Your place in life you can always change, whether you have the Gift or not. But you cannot change what the gods have made you. The sooner you accept that, the happier you will be’”.¹¹⁸ Mistress Cooper’s words ring true: Alanna instigated a change to her prescribed place in life when she came up with the plan to switch places with Thom, but it is clear that she must learn to accept herself as a female. And in a similar vein to Coram and his mother’s words, George tells Alanna, “‘I’m callin’ you Alanna, when we’re alone... I think you should be reminded of who you are’”.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ This is a lesson that George of the Famous Five series resists learning!

¹¹⁷ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, pp.136-7.

¹¹⁸ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.137.

¹¹⁹ Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.140.

Slowly, Alanna learns to live with her femaleness. In the next volume *In the Hand of the Goddess*, at the age of sixteen, Alanna asks Mistress Cooper to teach her how to be a girl:

‘I see all the Queen’s ladies wearing pretty things, and I’ve been thinking lately I like pretty things. I’m going to have to be a girl someday. Why shouldn’t I start practicing now?’¹²⁰

Alanna must continue to be Squire Alan at the palace, but in her free time she goes with Mistress Cooper to the city where they shop for clothes together. On these excursions, Alanna puts on a wig and gets accustomed to wearing skirts; she dresses in a strange sort of drag: she is a girl disguised as a boy disguised as a girl. With Mistress Cooper’s help, Alanna willingly begins to learn “the things most girls her age took for granted”.¹²¹

Although Alanna chooses to learn how to perform femininity, and her desire to look attractive and to wear pretty clothes and adornments increases dramatically in this book (she even dresses up in her girls’ outfits and admires herself in the mirror in her locked room), her ambition to become a knight never wavers. By the end of *In the Hand of the Goddess*, Alanna survives her Ordeal and becomes a knight – and Coram’s advice is proving to be true: ““Ye can be a woman and still be a warrior””.¹²²

¹²⁰ Pierce, T. *In The Hand of the Goddess*, p.123.

¹²¹ Pierce, T. *In The Hand of the Goddess*, p.129.

¹²² Pierce, T. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, p.106.

As Kel's gender is public knowledge, she is less panic-stricken than Alanna when she realises that she has developed breasts. The growth of Alanna's breasts and the arrival of her first menstrual period endangered her disguise – failure to conceal them may have resulted in the exposure of her gender, her expulsion from the palace and the end of her dream to become a knight. But even though there are far less dramatic consequences as a result of changes to Kel's body, Pierce does write about them as they are a significant part of growing up female – their inclusion in Kel's story of development makes it whole.

Like Alanna, Kel lives among boys and men at the palace, but her maid Lalasa, with whom she shares a great trust and friendship, becomes her confidante on female bodily matters. Obviously, there is no need for Kel to bind her breasts (she wears the Tortallan equivalent of a brassiere, called a breastband), but all the same, she is not happy to have them: “There was little she could do about the boys’ future comments, except choose her clothes with care and hope that her new, inconvenient badges of womanhood grew slowly”.¹²³

Kel is a little more emotional when she gets her first menstrual period on the day of the second-year pages’ tests; she cries, a little, and complains: “I hate my body doing new things without telling me”.¹²⁴ She has been working hard to discipline her body to behave in ways appropriate for a page, but of course, a new challenge has spontaneously appeared and she must learn to deal with it. With

¹²³ Pierce, T. *Page*, p.58.

¹²⁴ Pierce, T. *Page*, p.96.

Lalasa's help, Kel changes into clean clothes, and as she does they share stories of how the moods of women they both know are affected during their monthlies: "Some get the weeps with monthlies, like cramps... My mama got plain mean right before hers'" (Lalasa) "Mine gets hungry for sweets'" (Kel).¹²⁵ There is no time to drink some willow tea to soothe her cramps, but Kel promises to have it after she has completed her tests. She passes her tests and survives her first period with little fuss.¹²⁶

In *Song of the Lioness and Protector of the Small*, marriage is not presented as an inevitable milestone or an end-point in Alanna and Kel's stories of development. They both reflect on the effect that marriage will have on their lives as knights. Pierce allows her heroines to decide for themselves what they want: Alanna chooses knighthood *and* marriage, while Kel chooses knighthood *over* marriage.

In *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*, Prince Jonathan proposes marriage to Alanna, and she is troubled by how her life will be affected if she marries the future king. Alanna is well aware that as a noble and royal wife, her first duty will be to

¹²⁵ Pierce, T. *Page*, p.96.

¹²⁶ Little more is mentioned about Kel's periods in the remainder of the series, although in *Squire*, Kel does have to pack cloth pads in her kit when she leaves on a mission with Lord Raoul and the other knights. But then, there is no need to focus on Kel's menstrual periods from a plot perspective, after the first one, which is a significant event in a girl's development; presumably, Kel deals with her periods as a matter of course – obviously they do not trouble her or affect her activities or achievements. She probably brushes her teeth and uses the toilet like a normal person does, but there is no need to tell us! The inclusion of Kel's and Alanna's first menstrual periods, Alanna's anxiety and confusion, Kel's tears, are important points of recognition for girls who may read the books, for many whom puberty is a stressful time. In addition, this reinforces Alanna and Kel as heroic girls/women, that is, heroes rather than superheroes.

bear her husband an heir. But more than this, Alanna sees that marrying Jonathan will bring new restrictions to her life, as she will be expected to behave in a manner befitting a noble wife and future queen (which her convent education would have no doubt prepared her for, had she dutifully abided by her father's plans). Having been a knight for less than a year, she is not prepared to risk having to give up everything she has worked so hard for. She knows that marrying Prince Jonathan will be the wrong choice to make, as she will have to change herself in ways she is not prepared to: "I don't want to be well-behaved, as nobleman's wife should be. The King and Queen would try to make me stop dressing comfortably. They might even try to make me stop healing. I couldn't go wherever I wanted. No risks, no adventures".¹²⁷ Ironically, in doing exactly what she wants to as a knight, Alanna rescues the princess who ends up becoming Jonathan's wife.

The Song of the Lioness quartet does end with marriage (well, the promise of one), though it is clear that Alanna is choosing marriage *as well as* her knighthood. The man Alanna eventually agrees to marry is George Cooper. A commoner by birth, George has never been part of the royal court, and lives by very different customs to Prince Jonathan.¹²⁸ George has shown a romantic interest in Alanna for years, even before he ever saw her in feminine clothes, but she has resolutely insisted they remain just friends, thinking that falling in love will mean the end of her independence.

¹²⁷ Pierce, T. *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man*, pp.146-7

¹²⁸ When Jonathan becomes King he appoints George his confidential agent, granting him nobility, lands and the title of Baron, Pierce, T. *Lioness Rampant*, pp.243-244.

At the end of *Lioness Rampant* when Alanna tells George she loves him, he asks her if she loves him enough to give up roaming and settle down, but he corrects himself immediately, saying, “Well, to roam with me along”, perhaps realizing that he has just parroted a marriage cliché to her (with “get married” comes, without thinking, “settle down”) – a cliché that will definitely not apply to their marriage.

While Alanna says she will become the “lady of Pirate’s Swoop”, George calls her King’s Champion and Lioness – titles which honour her and acknowledge her knighthood – clearly, as far as George is concerned, she can certainly be a knight as well as his partner.¹²⁹ I have mentioned how while Alanna has to remain disguised as Alan, George insists on calling her “Alanna” so that she will not forget who she is. In a similar way, George’s calling her King’s Champion and Lioness reminds Alanna of who she is – she is a woman who plays different roles: knight, defender of the King and soon, lady. As well as agreeing to marry George, Alanna indicates her willingness to have children after a year or two – again, this is presented as her own choice, rather than a prescribed duty.¹³⁰ In later Tortall books, Alanna is still an active knight as well as a wife and mother.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Alanna’s different titles are reminiscent of Jo March’s different ‘names’ in *Little Men* and *Jo’s Boys* – she is no longer called just “Jo”, recognising her independence and individuality, but is known as Mother Bhaer, Mrs. Jo or Aunt Jo, recognizing her identity *in relation to others* – as mother, wife and aunt.

¹³⁰ Pierce, T. *Lioness Rampant*, p.308.

¹³¹ In fact, in *Trickster’s Choice*, George appears to be the primary stay-at-home parent, as Alanna is often away carrying out her duties as a knight – the book begins with Alanna returning home from a tour of duty. But then perhaps it is not ideal for a full-time knight to be a mother, for Alanna and her daughter have a somewhat strained relationship – a reflection, perhaps, of realism within this fantasy story.

In *Protector of the Small*, Kel chooses knighthood *over* marriage. In *Squire*, she spends much time pondering over her relationship with her sweetheart Cleon, even discussing it with her mother, but ultimately Kel makes her own decision, having realised that for herself, gaining her knight's shield is more important than any other distractions, including romance, sex and marriage. Kel's decision has, in a way, been pre-empted by external factors beyond her control. Because Cleon is two years ahead of Kel, they often find themselves apart for long periods of time, due to their different assignments. Even when they can be together, opportunities to be alone are scarce. In addition, another major obstacle exists – Cleon's duty to his family. Cleon's mother has years ago arranged his marriage to a rich heiress with a fine dowry. While Cleon is hopeful that he will be able to change his mother's mind about the arranged marriage, Kel knows that as the youngest daughter of a family that is not wealthy, her dowry will be no comparison.¹³²

After she has gained her knight's shield, Kel is still not ready to consider marriage. Kel knows that Cleon would love to have children with her, and she knows she does want "love and children, too – someday".¹³³ But there are more important things to focus on in the immediate future. First, she is a new knight and far from ready to settle down (just as Alanna was, in *The Woman Who Rides Like A Man*). Second, Tortall is on the verge of war against Scanra. Third, and even more importantly, Kel has been set a task by the magical Chamber of Ordeal to track

¹³² Pierce, T. *Lady Knight*, p.23.

¹³³ Pierce, T. *Lady Knight*, p.23.

down the man who is killing children, using their spirits to create powerful killing devices that are terrorizing the Tortallan countryside.

When Kel and Cleon are reunited after more than a year apart, Kel is shocked to realise that she no longer has passionate feelings for Cleon. This, and the things Kel wants to do as a knight help her decide to break up with Cleon once and for all. But before Kel can do this, Cleon informs her that his arranged marriage will now be going ahead, for the money from the marriage is needed to ensure that the people on his family's fiefdom will not starve. And so, with the issue of marriage put to rest, *Lady Knight* tells the story of Kel's first few years as a knight, during the time of Tortall's war against Scanra.

At the conclusion of the series, Kel is about to embark on a well-deserved holiday. Brown and St. Clair comment on the endings of young adult novels that feature empowered girls, suggesting:

Because the characters in these most recent novels seldom see their lives as a closed book, to be read once and interpreted narrowly, their stories seldom end with all loose ends tied up. The "Reader, I married him" ending that characterizes so much nineteenth century literature for females... has been replaced with endings that imply possibilities to be considered and questions still to be answered.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Brown, J. and N. St. Clair, *Declarations of Independence*, p.180.

This is certainly true of Protector's ending. The final book and the series end positively, with hope and anticipation of more challenges to come and of the immediate future where old friends will be reunited. Kel has no lover or marriage, but she is clearly loved and respected by her friends, colleagues and the people she is leaving behind at the refugee camp. The ending of the series is undoubtedly open-ended, happy and optimistic.

The Significance of (Hetero)Sexuality

As Pierce's heroines mature, they develop into sexual beings, physically attracted to and desired by members of the opposite sex. Of course, Pierce does not actually describe sexual acts in any detail within the texts (I suggest this is yet another manifestation of the Sternheimer's "Fear of Sex", as discussed in Chapter Four). But it is significant and not merely coincidental that Alanna and Kel and all the other characters we get to know are unquestionably male or female, and heterosexual.

Although Alanna and Kel transcend gender boundaries by becoming knights, it is important to note that they do not completely reject *all* gender boundaries. They are not gender 'deviants' by any means. They possess attributes which may be *associated* with masculinity, but we would not call them *masculine*. Their stories are still clearly stories of *female* development. Certain markers identify and reaffirm Alanna and Kel's femaleness and femininity by Tortallan (and our real world's) standards. Kimberley Reynolds has suggested that while girls in more recent stories

dress differently, are more active and experience more physical freedom...
 their roles have remained more or less constant. ...The domestic angel may
 have been replaced by the cricketer or sky nurse [or knight], but ultimately
 she seeks to please in much the same as she always did.¹³⁵

Alanna's femaleness is established at the beginning of the very first book of the series, emphasised by the very necessity and act of her disguise. It is significant that Alanna's disguise and masculine performance are part of a *temporary* gendered state, and her horror at her changing female body is transitory. After that point of initial horror, between the first and second books of the series, we see Alanna accepting and acknowledging her femaleness and femininity when she declares, "I'm going to have to be a girl someday", and resolves to "start practising now".¹³⁶ Alanna wants to practice femininity so that she will be able to perform it correctly when "someday" comes. Her rebellion against gender conventions is only a means to a specific outcome; ultimately, Alanna does want to fit in with society's gender norms. She wants to have a socially meaningful and gendered life. Judith Butler argues that

[t]he social constraints upon gender compliance and deviation are so great that most people feel deeply wounded if they are told they exercise their manhood or womanhood improperly [This is why Alanna consciously *practises* femininity – she wants to perform it properly and correctly]. In so far as social existence requires an unambiguous gender affinity, it is not possible to exist in a socially meaningful sense outside established gender

¹³⁵ Reynolds, K. *Girls Only?*, p.155, my parentheses.

¹³⁶ Pierce, T. *In the Hand of the Goddess*, p.123.

norms. ... If human existence is always gendered existence, then to stray outside of established gender is in some sense to put one's very existence into question.¹³⁷

From her eight years of training Alanna will emerge knowledgeable in the ways a knight is supposed to behave, but she must also behave as a woman, because her existence is gendered – she will be a woman as well as a knight.

Alanna and Kel's heterosexuality ensures that despite their unorthodox choice of career, they fit unproblematically into the hegemonic male/female heterosexual binary, what Butler terms the heterosexual matrix in *Gender Trouble* and heterosexual hegemony in *Bodies That Matter*.¹³⁸ Alanna and Kel are models of heterosexuality and normality according to the heterosexual matrix/hegemony for their impressionable readers – their stories are not merely stories of female development, they are stories of specifically *heterosexual* female development. We see Alanna grapple with her temper and feelings of jealousy when Lady Delia captures the attention (and affection) of Prince Jonathan, and later, we see her jealous streak again when a woman flirts with Liam. Prince Jonathan and Liam are both ex-lovers of Alanna's.¹³⁹ Kel harbours a secret crush on Neal when they are

¹³⁷ Butler, J. "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault", in Salih, S., ed. with J. Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.27, my parentheses.

¹³⁸ Salih, S. "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions (1990)" [Editor's Introduction], in Salih, S., ed. with J. Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.91. Also see Extracts from *Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler: Interview with Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal*, London 1993. Accessed 1 October 2006, at <http://www.theory.org.uk/but-int1.htm>.

¹³⁹ The author has addressed the issue of pre-marital sex in her books on her website, <http://www.tamora-pierce.com/sexnviol.htm>, accessed 24 May 2006. She writes: "Whenever I'm asked ['Why do you have teenagers engage in unprotected sex and have babies at such a young age?'] I have to ask in return how familiar people are with the Middle Ages. . Because I like to start from our real world with pretty much everything I write, my treatment of these topics is, for the most

both pages. She can't help notice how physically attractive her enemy Joren is,¹⁴⁰ and she even finds Lord Wyldon handsome.¹⁴¹ When she meets Neal's handsome cousin Dom, she feels all "breathless and tingly".¹⁴² And of course, she has a boyfriend, Cleon.

I have argued throughout this thesis that the children's and/or young adult text seeks to socialise its audience. Such work, Robert Sutherland suggests, are "informed and shaped by authors' respective value systems, their notions of how the world *is* or *ought to be*".¹⁴³ There are repercussions for the recalcitrant text, for "those who are threatened – and who fear the work's persuasive power [where the work is seen to be persuasive in the *wrong* way] – may try to limit the work's accessibility to young minds," which may lead to more serious consequences including "ideological rejection of manuscripts by publishers, the writing of negative book reviews to discourage sales, official silence (nonmention) on the part of librarians and teachers, and moves to censorship and banning".¹⁴⁴ The ideologies reflected in works for a young audience are therefore determined *not only* by the authors' own value systems, but by powers external to the author and text. I have

part, drawn from the historical world... Up until fairly recently (as in, the 1800s), people in their teens were adults. From the beginning of time people 14 and older, depending on their physical development, married, had children, and supported them as best as they could. People in my books actually start engaging in sexual behavior and child-bearing several years later than they would have done in years past." Pierce's characters have sex, but she refers to it, rather than describes it.

¹⁴⁰ Pierce, T. *First Test*, p.55

¹⁴¹ Pierce, T. *First Test*, p.24.

¹⁴² Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.41.

¹⁴³ Sutherland, Robert D. "Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children." *Children's Literature in Education* 16, no. 3, 1985, p.143.

¹⁴⁴ Sutherland, R.D. "Hidden Persuaders", p.151, my parentheses.

discussed, for example, Pierce's awareness and consideration of such external forces with regards to the level of violence she includes in her books.

Texts such as *Song of the Lioness* and *Protector of the Small* affirm what Gayle Rubin calls the "sex value system" and "sex hierarchy"¹⁴⁵ and Judith Butler refers to as the "sex-gender system", which has "a vested interest in instituting and maintaining strict distinctions between 'man' and 'woman,' 'gay' and 'straight,' 'black' and 'white' and so forth"¹⁴⁶, and what Monique Wittig sees, according to Butler, as "a gender system predicated upon the alleged naturalness of binary oppositions and, consequently, heterosexuality".¹⁴⁷ Books for the young, therefore, reflect the common, dominant and morally approved "binary discourse[s] on sex in which "men" and "women" exhaust the possibilities of sex, and relate to each other as complementary opposites... subsumed under the discourse of heterosexuality".¹⁴⁸

The heterosexuality of Alanna and Kel are examples of Robert Sutherland's politics of assent, which "not only affirms the status quo but continually reinforces it".¹⁴⁹ Sherrie Inness argues that this politics of assent is evident in children's books "when all the characters a reader encounters are heterosexual, reaffirming the idea

¹⁴⁵ Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" in Vance, Carole S. ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. London: Pandora, 1989, pp.280-284. Rubin argues that "sexual morality has more in common with ideologies of racism than with true ethics. It grants virtue to the dominant groups, and relegates vice to the underprivileged", p.283.

¹⁴⁶ Salih, S. "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary (1993)" [Editor's Introduction], in Salih, S., ed. with J. Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.141.

¹⁴⁷ Butler, J. "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault", in Salih, S., ed. with J. Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.30.

¹⁴⁸ Butler, J. "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault", in Salih, S., ed. with J. Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.32.

¹⁴⁹ Sutherland, R.D. "Hidden Persuaders", p.152.

that heterosexuality is the one “normal” sexual orientation”.¹⁵⁰ She also suggests that “[a] juvenile book may not make specific derogatory comments about homosexuality, but when it fails to include any gay or lesbian characters, it suggests that homosexuals do not exist”.¹⁵¹ None of Pierce’s characters are homosexual. Throughout the series, we see only heterosexual characters, and the getting together of heterosexual couples is common: Sir Myles and Eleni Cooper, King Jonathan and Queen Thayet, and Coram and Rispah in *The Song of the Lioness*; Kel and Cleon, Neal and Yuki, and Prince Roald and Princess Shinkokami in *Protector of the Small*. This trend is also present in the other Tortallan series.

There are a number of references to ‘other’ sexualities, in *Lioness* and *Protector*, but they are not discussed as part of the norm; in fact, homosexuality is used as an insult. This is not to suggest that *Lioness* and *Protector* are homophobic texts. When Neal taunts Kel’s enemies by suggesting that two of them are lovers, he explains to Kel that “‘talk of different kinds of sex makes people crazy’”,¹⁵² and that “‘Manly fellows like Joren think it’s a deadly insult to be accused of wanting other men’”.¹⁵³ This doesn’t make sense to Kel; she does not see the insult, saying matter-of-factly: “‘Some men prefer other men. Some women prefer other women.’ [She] shrugged”.¹⁵⁴ As Kel is the touchstone through which values, actions and characters are judged and measured, her nonchalant response to the power of

¹⁵⁰ Inness, Sherrie A. *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity, and the Representation of Lesbian Life*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997, p.109.

¹⁵¹ Inness, S.A. *The Lesbian Menace*, p.109.

¹⁵² Pierce, T. *Page*, p.50.

¹⁵³ Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.51.

¹⁵⁴ Pierce, T. *Page*, p.46.

homosexuality as an insult indicates a subtle message of anti-homophobia. But of course not one of the endorsed ‘good’ characters (or any character, good or bad) prefers his or her own sex. Kel’s knight-master Lord Raoul isn’t bothered by gossip that he’s been ““in bed with other men for years, since [he’s] not married””,¹⁵⁵ but of course, by the end of the series, he has found a (heterosexual) partner in Buri. The heterosexual matrix, the status quo, is maintained.

Sherrie Inness also argues that “When adult writers of children’s books depict only heterosexual characters and disregard lesbians entirely, they are creating a world view that they wish a child or young adult to adopt”.¹⁵⁶ This heteronormative view of the world is reflected in texts for young people because people generally do not wish their children to grow up with concepts different from their own,¹⁵⁷ or absorb (to use Sternheimer’s metaphor again) values different or in opposition to their own, because heterosexuality is still the hegemonic sexuality, with homosexuality still the ultimate taboo, “something that most parents do not even want their children to be aware of”.¹⁵⁸ Tamora Pierce’s books certainly do not reflect homophobic attitudes, but in her role as a mainstream, popular author for young adults she cannot be seen to be presenting homosexuality as the norm.

¹⁵⁵ Pierce, T. *Squire*, p.29.

¹⁵⁶ Inness, S.A. *The Lesbian Menace*, p.108.

¹⁵⁷ Inness, S.A. *The Lesbian Menace*, p.108.

¹⁵⁸ Inness, S.A. *The Lesbian Menace*, p.105. As Inness discusses in detail, censors do pounce on books that present ideologically inappropriate subject matter or themes, with homosexuality high on the inappropriate list.

According to Judith Butler, the identification of the “girl” or “boy” (she gives the example of the doctor’s declaration at a baby’s birth, “It’s a girl!”) is not neutral or descriptive – in the case of “It’s a girl”, the girl is interpellated as and thereby “becomes” a sexed and gendered subject.¹⁵⁹ In all texts, *especially* the children’s text, “girl” and “boy” carry certain social and cultural values, assumptions and expectations regarding appropriate gender enactment within the heterosexual matrix. As a tool of socialization, the story of the girl who resists her “girling” ends appropriately in accordance with social laws and values – in the case of Lioness and Protector, both Alanna and Kel resist the “girl” career choice but accept the other aspects of their “girling”. There have been stories of boys who appear to resist their “boying”, or fail to “boy” as they should (and once again, by the end of the stories, this is rectified – the boy is successfully “boyed”), and I will discuss a few of them now.

Robert Sutherland suggests that boys in children’s fiction “who did not conform to society’s assumptions regarding masculinity were either intellectuals or ‘sissies’ – both categories being seen as deviant and providing poor role models, the first being subject to ridicule, the second serving as an object of scorn”.¹⁶⁰ We see an example of this in Enid Blyton’s *Five Go Off to Camp* (1948) in the character of Cecil Dearlove, who comes to Owl Farm to spend the day with the Five’s friend Jock. Cecil is portrayed in an unfavourable light by Blyton. He is “small for twelve years old” (in contrast to Julian, described at the beginning of the book as “tall and

¹⁵⁹ Salih, S. “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary (1993)” [Editor’s Introduction], in Salih, S., ed. with J. Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.140.

¹⁶⁰ Sutherland, R.D. “Hidden Persuaders”, p.155.

strong for his age”¹⁶¹), with “curly hair which was too long”. He wears a grey flannel suit which “was very, very clean and well-pressed”.¹⁶²

Although Jock’s mother Mrs. Andrews wants her son to play with Cecil, she does tell the Five that Cecil is “a bit of a mother’s boy”.¹⁶³ Jock terrorises Cecil by dressing up in his Red Indian costume and face paint and chasing him around the farm while brandishing a tomahawk. The Five merely laugh at this, agreeing with Jock that Cecil is “awful”. The Five call Cecil names: “Poor icle thing”, “Darling baby” and “Mother’s Pet”, and cruelly convince Cecil that he is about to be charged by a non-existent bull.¹⁶⁴ Even though the Five are in fact behaving badly by being unkind and uncharitable, it is clear that the implied adult narrator is on their side. Because Cecil is identified as a mother’s boy and thus fails to meet society’s expectations of masculinity, it is implied that he deserves to be ridiculed, teased and tricked by the ‘normal’ children. Mrs. Andrews merely laughs when Julian politely but quite clearly mockingly suggests beading or a jigsaw puzzle as suitable activities for Cecil – so-called gender transgression or perversion is presented negatively so there can be no chance boy readers will identify with the boy who fails to meet with society’s expectations of masculinity, or want to imitate him:

Perversion is denied through the exclusion of specific references and
 through the implication to be other than the ideal is to be only despicable,
 but also incapacitated. Through these means boys’ fiction attempts to

¹⁶¹ Blyton, E. *Five Go Off to Camp*. Leicester: Brockhampton Press, 1974, p.7.

¹⁶² Blyton, E. *Five Go Off to Camp*, p.430.

¹⁶³ Blyton, E. *Five Go off to Camp*, p. 110.

¹⁶⁴ Blyton, E. *Five Go Off to Camp*, p.436.

ensure that the kind of sexuality to which its readers aspire is that which most adults find comfortable – heterosexual love is the only possible outcome of maturity.¹⁶⁵

Published around the same time as *Five Go off to Camp*, Blyton's *Six Cousins at Mistletoe Farm* (1948) and *Those Dreadful Children* (1949) present stories of development of a group of boys and girls. Each character has a weakness or fault to overcome; Jane must learn not to be so messy and dirty; Melisande must learn not to be so vain; Annette must learn not to be a tattle-tale, and so on. Cyril Longfield of *Six Cousins* learns to become one of the boys. When Cyril first arrives at Mistletoe Farm, his cousin Jack notices that Cyril looks as if "he had taken a lot of trouble with his clothes –much too much... And yet he looked sloppy, though probably he meant to look artistic. His tie was a floppy bow. His shirt was a peculiar colour. And he wore sandals!"¹⁶⁶ Ridiculed by narrator and his cousins for his appearance, Cyril is portrayed as priggish and pretentious. He does not like playing football with the other boys at school; he prefers to read and write poetry. But over the course of his time at Mistletoe Farm, where he is exposed to the hard physical labour of farm life, and masculine models in his cousin Jack and his Uncle, Cyril undergoes a physical as well as attitudinal transformation:

He had grown strong and muscular with all the work he had done on the farm, and discovered that he was unexpectedly good on the football field.

The others found that they were up against someone tough now when they tackled Cyril, someone sturdy and hard as nails. He began to delight in his

¹⁶⁵ Reynolds, K. *Girls Only?*, p.61.

¹⁶⁶ Blyton, Enid. *Six Cousins at Mistletoe Farm*. London: Armada, n.d., pp.19-20.

strength, and no longer sneered at Jack when he grew enthusiastic over the school matches. In fact, he and Jack had animated discussions about teams and method of play, much to the quiet amusement of Mrs. Longfield.¹⁶⁷

A similar transformation takes place in *Those Dreadful Children*. When the rough and tumble Taggerty family moves in next door to the prim and proper Carlton family, Mr. Carlton is delighted that his son John will be exposed to Pat Taggerty, his idea of “a proper boy”. Mr. Carlton describes Pat to his wife:

‘A fine boy, merry and with plenty to say. A proper boy, too – won all the races at his last sports, can climb any tree, according to his father, and is as plucky as a boy can be. He broke his ankle last year, doing something mad, and never made a murmur about it’.¹⁶⁸

Of his own son, Mr. Carlton says, “John’s too girlish... I want him to be more of a boy”. He hopes that Pat Taggerty “will shake [John] up a bit”.¹⁶⁹ Mr. Carlton, we are told, “liked boys who wanted to go for walks and tramp through the woods and over the hills”, but John, disappointingly “didn’t like walks. He wanted to say at home and read”.¹⁷⁰ And as Mr Carlton hopes, the influence of Pat Taggerty begins to show in his son, and so the “boying” of John begins:

John soon began to revel in all the exciting games the Taggertys played, Red Indians, Burglars and Policeman, Pirates, Dragons, Witches and the rest of them. He became what Daddy called a “real boy”, and actually

¹⁶⁷ Blyton, E. *Six Cousins at Mistletoe Farm*, p.153.

¹⁶⁸ Blyton, Enid. *Those Dreadful Children*. London: Armada, 1980, p.28.

¹⁶⁹ Blyton, E. *Those Dreadful Children*, p.30.

¹⁷⁰ Blyton, E. *Those Dreadful Children*, p.31.

asked to go with him one afternoon when Daddy was setting off for one of his walks.¹⁷¹

Like in *Six Cousins at Mistletoe Farm*, the football field is the site where a boy's transformation to "real boy" can be seen. John even imitates Pat, his model of "boying":

[Pat] was soon one of the stars in the football team, sturdy, quick, fearless and a very fast runner. John was quite good, but too afraid of being hurt to be really first-class. He was not as reckless as Pat either, and his over-cautiousness made him miss many chances of playing really well. Still, he was much better than he had been before, mostly because he was copying Pat and trying to be as plucky as he was.¹⁷²

Obviously, for Blyton, the "girlish" boy's story of development is driven by the process of his "boying". His unsatisfactory boyishness is a flaw that requires correcting. Both Cyril and John learn to be "proper" Boy's Own boys by the end of their respective stories.

A more recent text which features a boy who is not typically masculine has a very different agenda. In Emily Rodda's *Rowan of Rin* (1993), Rowan is a timid, gentle boy, who feels different to everyone else in his village. In the village of Rin, men and women are physically strong, active and courageous. Both women and men carry out physically demanding work in the village, and women take on roles

¹⁷¹ Blyton, E. *Those Dreadful Children*, p.75.

¹⁷² Blyton, E. *Those Dreadful Children*, p.101.

traditionally associated with men, such as miller and furniture maker. When the stream of fresh water which the village depends upon suddenly stops, Rowan and a group of villagers go on a quest to investigate the cause. Despite their physical strength, one by one, the villagers falter, unable to cope with challenges that arise because imagination and mental agility are required to overcome them, rather than physical strength. Only Rowan is able to cope, for he has never been able to rely on physical strength and has had to solve problems creatively and intuitively. The message here is clear: strength and courage are not the only or most valuable attributes of heroes; creativity and intuitiveness, attributes more often associated with femininity and softness may be just as valuable.

In the end, it is Rowan's gentleness which saves the day. Faced with an angry dragon, Rowan realises that it is in pain, with a bone stuck in its throat. He removes the bone, appeasing the dragon's rage. The dragon repays Rowan's good deed by using its fire to melt the ice at the top of the mountain to start the stream flowing once more. Had Rowan been a more traditional physical, all-conquering masculine hero and slain the attacking dragon, the village would have been ruined. *Rowan of Rin* is an interesting text because of its different perspective on heroic attributes, but although in 1993 a boy like Rowan is not as harshly judged as Cecil Dearlove and can even be a hero, the distinct binaries of masculine/feminine and physical strength/gentleness are still very much intact, and Rowan is portrayed as an unusual, rather than 'normal' boy.

In this chapter, I have examined the female protagonists of two fairly recently published fantasy series written by Tamora Pierce: Alanna of the Song of the Lioness quartet, and Kel of the Protector of the Small quartet. Alanna and Kel may appear on the surface to be tomboys; after all, they choose to live and work among boys and men to pursue their respective dreams of becoming knights – in Alanna’s case totally unheard of for girls, in Kel’s case, definitely not the norm for girls. In this chapter however, I have argued that Alanna and Kel are not tomboys. Instead, they reveal that the girl protagonist and the female story of development have evolved significantly. A girl can be strong, proactive and adventurous – she can become a knight, and she can even choose not to marry – without needing to be portrayed as *unfeminine* or *anti-feminine* as most tomboys have been. She can grow up to be a warrior as well as a woman.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the production of children’s literature has been shaped by adult concern for what children are exposed to in their reading. I have demonstrated that the tomboy character has continued to evolve as a result of such concern, through shifts in the representation of gender, the representation of female development, and in what is thought to be appropriate, normal, and exemplary for an impressionable audience of young “sponges”. In this chapter, I have focused on the characters and texts within the frames of three interrelated types of text: the young adult text, the fantasy text, and the *bildungsroman* (in this case in the form of *series* of development). I have asserted that the adult concern for appropriateness extends to *all* fiction produced for young

people, including the young adult text. I have explored the idea of ‘responsibility’ using the example of the portrayal of violence in *Lioness and Protector*: although Pierce presents two female protagonists who are directly involved in violent acts, she depicts the violence in a ‘responsible’ way. The author has herself stated her aversion to “mindless brutality” and it is clear that she consciously aims not to glorify the acts of violence carried out in her texts. The ‘good’ characters are rewarded, the ‘bad’ ones punished, reflecting one of the major themes of the fantasy genre: the triumph of good over evil.

The fantasy genre allows its authors a certain degree of freedom that realist authors do not have. In creating his or her fantasy world, the author also creates its social and cultural conventions, which includes gender roles and expectations which he or she can challenge or subvert as desired. In Pierce’s fantasy world not only can boys grow up to become knights, so too can girls.

As recent examples of female *bildungsroman* and as examples of the fantasy female *bildungsroman*, *Song of the Lioness* and *Protector of the Small* are markedly different when compared with *bildungsroman* discussed in previous chapters, specifically *Little Women* and the *Little House* series. *Little Women* and the *Little House* both depicted the ambivalence of their protagonists, as Jo and Laura learned to accept and perform femininity, but a key difference between those stories of development and Pierce’s texts is in their endings. I have asserted that in *Lioness* and *Protector*, the figure of the girl we have named and recognised as “the tomboy”

has been replaced with a girl whose story of development follows a new path towards a very different outcome – a more satisfying one, in which marriage is not necessarily the ultimate state and goal of both female fulfilment and compliance. Alanna and Kel develop into warriors – they are allowed by Pierce to achieve the ambitions that they have so long desired and worked towards. While Alanna's story ends with the promise of marriage, Kel's does not, but both series end on satisfying, positive, buoyant notes, with every indication that Alanna and Kel will continue to be knights.

The young female character has progressed from the days of the fairy tale princess waiting for her prince charming to come. Alanna and Kel develop into adventurous, proactive, assertive, independent, ambitious and starkly *physical* heroines – they display attributes which have been traditionally associated with male action heroes in boys' action and adventure stories. But *Song of the Lioness* and *Protector of the Small* are most definitely series of *female* development. Pierce has her protagonists deal firsthand with issues related to the experience of growing up female. They must overcome gender discrimination and prejudice (for Alanna, her own internalised prejudice), come to terms with their maturing bodies, and reflect on the implications of marriage – and then make their own choices.

Alanna and Kel compel us to look beyond the familiar stereotypes of femininity and masculinity and to recognise that female characters can now be both feminine *and* action heroes. Their stories of development have happy and satisfying

endings which do not always include marriage. In the traditional *bildungsroman*, the tomboy figure, that recalcitrant girl, expressed her rebellion in the limited ways available to her, in her temporary phase of resistance to femininity. Her story of development would conclude with a kind of forgetfulness – her exuberance and desires replaced with passivity, self-sacrifice and contentment in marriage.

Conclusion

The evolution of the tomboy character in children's literature has reflected changes in society's ideas about what is thought to be ideologically appropriate in the children's text, including how gender is represented. Children's literature is *always* written to educate as well as entertain, even though the educational content of some of the texts may not always be apparent. The educational aspects of children's texts do not always appear in an obviously instructional form; the educational 'message' may not be as easily identified as, for example, a moral in the manner of: "pride comes before a fall", or "slow and steady wins the race". Children's fiction exists for the purpose of socializing its target audience, because childhood is seen as "the crucial formative period in the life of a human being, the time for basic education about the nature of the world, how to live in it, how to relate to other people, what to believe, what, and how to think".¹ This thesis has explored the evolution of this "basic *gender* education", as represented by the tomboy figure in children's literature.

Karen Sternheimer's argument that children are thought to be like sponges and will absorb whatever they are exposed to in the media² – movies, cartoons, video games, and of course, books – has been central in this thesis. This belief that children are like sponges has directly and significantly influenced the production of

¹ Stephens, John. *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction, Language in Social Life Series*. Harlow, Essex; New York: Longman, 1992, p.9.

² Sternheimer, Karen. *It's Not the Media: The Truth About Pop Culture's Influence on Children*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003, p.181.

children's literature, driving it for the most part to represent how the world is in 'responsible' and ideologically appropriate ways because *everything* presented in the children's text, that is, "how the world is" – not just the deliberately planted lessons, has the potential to be "absorbed" and therefore educate and even *mis*-educate its young readers during their "crucial formative period". This drive to educate children with ideologically appropriate content has shaped the evolution of the tomboy character in children's fiction.

Peter Hunt has argued that children's literature reveals more about adults than children.³ The study of children's literature exposes what adults have thought is appropriate for children to know, how ideas regarding the ideologically appropriate have changed over time, and importantly, which of these ideas have *not* changed, and in fact, remain steadfastly entrenched. Zohar Shavit refers to the audience of children's literature as an *ambivalent* audience⁴ – one which includes adults as well as children. While children are supposed to be the primary audience of children's literature, the adult audience of the children's text plays a powerful role in its production, as it is adults – the publishers, parents, educators, librarians, critics – who ultimately determine and control the production, purchase, distribution and legitimization of children's texts. It is, after all, adults who create and write books for children. Where a child has been an author of books for children – here, nine-year-old Jayne Fisher who created, wrote and illustrated the Garden Gang

³ Hunt, Peter. *An Introduction to Children's Literature*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, p.5.

⁴ Shavit, Zohar. *The Poetics of Children's Literature*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986, p.93.

series comes to mind – the ultimate editorial and publication decisions are made by the publisher, that is, once again, *adults* (in the case of the Garden Gang, Ladybird Books).

Ideology is expressed in children's literature in two ways, as identified by Robert Sutherland – the *politics of advocacy* and the *politics of assent*. According to Sutherland, *advocacy* is actively persuasive and deliberately didactic – it “seeks to persuade readers of its ideology; to promote the authors’ world views and notions of what is or ought to be; to influence readers’ thinking, feeling and behavior”.⁵ *Assent*, however, is “an author’s passive, unquestioning acceptance and internalization of an established ideology, which is then transmitted in the author’s writing in an unconscious manner.”⁶ That “established ideology” comprises values and beliefs widely accepted within society, which is reflected in the society’s (and the author’s) assumptions about how the world is and what is normal and universal – which is in turn represented in the text. This thesis has explored examples of both advocacy and assent, which demonstrate society’s ideas regarding what has been and is considered appropriate for children to know, especially in relation to gender and gender roles, in the depiction of not only tomboys, but different types of male and female characters. In a number of texts discussed, this has included the tomboy’s best friend, sister or cousin, usually portrayed as her feminine opposite.

⁵ Sutherland, Robert D. “Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children”. *Children's Literature in Education* 16, no. 3, 1985, p.147.

⁶ Sutherland, R.D. “Hidden Persuaders”, p.151.

Sherrie A. Inness identifies two distinct categories of series within children's literature: 'books in a series' and 'series books'.⁷ The 'books in series' are *bildungsroman* – stories/series of development which depict the young female protagonist's development into womanhood. At the beginning of such series, the tomboy protagonist is discontented with the expectations and limits placed upon her because she is a girl. But although she questions and rebels against femininity, her tomboyishness is only a temporary stage of girlhood, and her story shows that she is destined to grow up and accept her gendered place in the world, as a conforming member of patriarchal, heterosexual society. The tomboy's story of development therefore presents an *ideologically appropriate* example of the 'gendering' of the female subject – the story of a girl who learns how to be appropriately and correctly female/feminine.

The other kind of series, 'series books', works under a different dynamic. These texts are not focused on stories of development which depict the process of growing up – instead, they feature adventures and mysteries churned out according to formula. The characters' ages are typically deliberately frozen to ensure the series can continue indefinitely, mass-produced and mass-marketed. In these books, tomboyishness is a distinguishing and permanent character trait, rather than a temporary phase which is grown out of (impossible to 'grow out of' as the characters do not 'grow'). The tomboy is a distinct member of a group of young sleuths and/or adventurers, each of whom usually has distinct physical features or

⁷ Inness, Sherrie A. *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997, p.2 [Introduction].

character attributes that distinguish him or her from the others within the group. Although ‘series books’ are unquestionably written to entertain and thrill their readers (perhaps best exemplified by the cliffhanger at the end of every chapter in the Nancy Drew books), their ideological appropriateness is still of concern to the publishers who produce them. The Nancy Drew Mystery Stories and the Trixie Belden Mystery series underwent official publisher-instigated revisions aimed to update and amend their ‘appropriateness’ in accordance with shifting cultural values and concerns regarding race, class, sex and gender.

Louise May Alcott’s ‘books in a series’, *Little Women*, *Little Men* and *Jo’s Boys* are probably the most blatantly didactic of all the texts discussed in this thesis. This can be mostly attributed to the timeframe in which they were published; during the nineteenth century, it was common for separate fictions to be produced for girls and boys, each designed to instruct its audience on correct gendered behaviour as well as good morals. Accordingly, many of *Little Women*’s plotlines revolve around moral and behavioural lessons learned by Jo March and her sisters, providing strong examples of the politics of advocacy. Similar lessons are presented in *Little Men* and *Jo’s Boys*.

Despite this didacticism, *Little Women* can be interpreted in contradictory ways: on one hand, the story of Jo’s development appears to teach girls that they should become domesticated, self-silencing, self-sacrificing ‘little women’. Jo’s self-expression, articulated through her emotions and her writing, is increasingly

subdued and silenced as she grows up. But on the other hand, *Little Women* may be also seen as being subtly subversive – it questions, through the portrayal of its tomboy Jo, the model of domesticity and femininity that it appears to also be promoting. Queer readings of Jo March suggest even more subversion, through the tomboy figure's exposure of gender as unstable and indeterminate. Jo does eventually enjoy a degree of success as an author (described humorously in the chapter "Jo's Last Scrape" in *Jo's Boys*), but at the time of her life that this happens, she clearly has more 'important' and compelling roles to play: she is Mrs. Jo the wife, Aunt Jo the aunt, and Mother Bhaer, maternal figure and instructor of many children – she is clearly happy and thriving in these roles. Jo's 'failure' to become an independent writer is lamented by many a modern reader, but her achievements as a mother, wife, aunt and instructor may be celebrated as successes in themselves. Despite the twenty-first-century reader's dissatisfaction with Jo's fate, it must be acknowledged that *Little Women*, *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys* were texts written for girls in the nineteenth century, and the questioning of gender roles could be framed only within certain boundaries – it was acceptable for gender roles and femininity to be questioned within the context of the temporary phase of tomboyishness, a temporary phase of challenge and recalcitrance – the key phrase here being *temporary phase*. The March texts could not and did not deviate too far from ideological appropriateness as defined during its time, and so Marmee preaches the virtues of the self-control of one's temper, Professor Bhaer preaches the evils of alcohol and criticises the writing of sensation fiction, and Jo dreams of

an artistic and literary “Castle in the Air” – a dream which can never become a reality.

The autobiographically-based Little House series by Laura Ingalls Wilder depicts the story of development and the learning of gender performance by its tomboy character Laura Ingalls. Judith Butler has argued that it is “the various acts of gender [that] create the idea of gender”, and that “the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*”,⁸ and this is illustrated throughout the Little House series, especially in the very first book *Little House in the Big Woods*. Laura’s parents Ma and Pa repeatedly perform gendered acts, establishing a clear distinction between the roles and separate domains of the genders: Ma’s daily routine takes place within the family home (the so-named little house), while Pa’s daily routine sees him leaving the little house to hunt, trap and trade. Ann Romines has argued that Ma and Pa represent two opposing gendered positions: through his repeated actions, Pa represents freedom, adventure, the outdoors, traveling, change and unpredictability – all things which Laura the tomboy is intrigued and energised by and attracted to. Ma, however, represents propriety, domesticity, self-restraint, self-denial and stability, everything Laura finds dull, stifling and restrictive. But as she is a girl, Laura’s story of development is about how she inevitably learns to repeat the gender performance of her mother. As it was for Jo March, the performance of femininity is not ‘naturally’ carried out correctly by Laura just because she happens to be a girl; Laura and Jo must both learn and accept what is expected of them. In

⁸ Butler, Judith P. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender. New York: Routledge, 1990, p.140.

the Little House series, Laura is disciplined and instructed by others, especially her mother and older sister Mary, when she does not conform. The contrast between the early Little House books and the later volumes is stark - in the early books Laura is enraptured by Pa's tales of adventure, helps Pa with his tasks and spends much of her time outdoors, interacting with and admiring nature. She refuses to wear her sun-bonnet correctly, as it hampers her vision and enjoyment of her surroundings. As she grows up, Laura's actions and activities increasingly mirror Ma's, and by the end of the series, Laura has clearly learned to correctly and repeatedly perform the various acts of gender that signify femininity, as a constantly self-disciplined and self-appraising body.

There are a number of similarities between Jo March and Laura Ingalls. Both girls have shining examples of femininity to follow in their mothers, and both learn (to their surprise), that their mothers experienced and continue to grapple with some of the same challenges; Jo's mother works hard every day to control her own temper, while Laura's mother also detests sewing, an activity which forms a major part of her (and Laura's, too) regular chores. While Jo March dreams of her "Castle in the Air", Laura longs to keep travelling westward, sleep under the stars and never settle down. Both work to earn money for their families – with her earnings, Jo is able to send her sickly sister Beth off on a seaside vacation, and with her earnings as a schoolteacher, Laura helps send her sister Mary to college. But Jo's writing and Laura's teaching careers are cut short for the men who will become their husbands; Jo gives up lucrative sensation story-writing after her friend Professor Bhaer

expresses his vehement disapproval, and Laura willingly gives up teaching to become a fulltime homemaker and farmer's wife near the end of the Little House series. In Jo and Laura's time, marriage was the expected outcome for stories of female development, and spinsterhood was portrayed in an unattractive light in both series. In *Little Women*, for example, Alcott implores her readers to take pity on spinsters, having herself created the unlikable spinster referred to privately by Jo and her sisters as Croaker. In the Little House series, Laura is unfairly picked upon and treated badly by the new teacher, who is a spinster, and by the conclusion of *These Happy Golden Years*, Laura and all of her friends are looking forward to marriage, or are at least being courted by a beau – spinsterhood is not a likely fate for any of them.

In contrast, as 'series books', The Nancy Drew Mystery Stories were not concerned with presenting characters' stories of development. Throughout the course of the series' seventy-three year span, however, its tomboy character George Fayne and her feminine opposite, her cousin Bess Marvin both evolved significantly to suit changing cultural values and new audiences. The official revision of the series between 1959 and 1976 not only removed racist and sexist stereotypes which had reflected the politics of assent at the original time of publication, but now many years later had become incompatible with shifting societal attitudes – the revisions also updated old-fashioned language, simplified the narrative style, and resulted in the tomboy character appearing less masculine. Statements which referred blatantly to her disregard of her own personal grooming,

her boyishness and unattractiveness to young men and the use of adjectives within the narrative which indicate George's aggression have been removed from the revised text. Over time in subsequent titles, George and Bess continued to visibly evolve. In accordance with the sleuthing group dynamic, George and Bess were still contrasted with one another – George's tomboyishness was conveyed less through actual 'boyishness' but more through an emphasised love of sports, while Bess became less plump, and was in fact portrayed increasingly as obsessed with dieting and body image – this obsession featuring prominently in a number of titles, where the dangers of crash dieting and the need for sensible balanced nutrition and regular exercise were strongly advocated.

The facsimile editions of the original text Nancy Drew books published by Applewood in the 1990s resurrected the original texts which featured the more-masculine George. These texts were marketed not for children, but for a nostalgic adult audience,⁹ intended to be read as works written during a specific *past* time. The tomboy is therefore framed in these facsimile editions as a historical figure – created from different values and different social standards, and importantly, not aimed at an audience of sponges and therefore not readily “absorbed” indiscriminately by them. With the publication of the new Nancy Drew Girl Detective series set in contemporary times, George, Bess and Nancy have evolved once again, with George now a computing and electronics expert, Bess a mechanical genius as well as a lover of shopping and fashion, and interestingly,

⁹ Zuckerman, Phil. “Publishing the Applewood Reprints.” In *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, edited by Carolyn Stewart and Nancy Tillman Romalov Dyer. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995, p.43.

Nancy Drew is no longer perfect and superior to her chums – George and Bess play more prominent roles in these new mysteries. The sleuthing group dynamic remains intact in these new texts,

The Trixie Belden series, however, began as ‘books in a series’ but became ‘series books’. As ‘books in a series’, the earlier books focus on Trixie’s tomboyishness and her struggles with femininity and growing up. She reflects upon her identity and her relationships with others. The later ‘series books’ are considerably shorter, focus more on mystery plots and significantly less on Trixie’s personal development. The publishers’ decision to fix the age of the characters was driven by concerns of practicality; it served to simplify the series timeline for the multiple ghost-writers commissioned to write the books. It allowed the Trixie Belden series to potentially continue for a long time, focused on mysteries and school vacations without temporal limitations and the complications of maturing characters.

The Trixie Belden series was also revised. Although by no means as drastic as the Nancy Drew revisions, particular changes in two of the Trixie Belden texts, #7 *The Mysterious Code* (1961) and #9 *The Happy Valley Mystery* (1962) had a significant effect on the portrayal of the tomboy. The problem with Trixie was not that she appeared too masculine; the problem identified by the series publisher was in Trixie’s blossoming romance with Jim – that the portrayal and ongoing development of a romantic relationship would lead to an inappropriate sexual one

(inappropriate for a children's series). This concern resulted in the significant toning down of Trixie and Jim's romance, which was then dropped from consequent texts without explanation, to the mystification of many readers.

Although the character of Trixie Belden exhibits attitudes that could be called feminist, the representation of gender in the series is strongly patriarchal, essential and heteronormative. Trixie Belden appears to question and resist femininity, but ultimately *does not*. She possesses a strong desire to be accepted and to gain the approval of others. Heteronormative and gendered behaviour is reinforced through the figure of Trixie Belden as well as through her best friends, Honey and Di in terms of *the gaze*, which reflects a heteronormative code of desire and reinforces the masculine/feminine binary and 'appropriate' gendered behaviour. The tomboy construct in this series is presented as being in a perpetual state of becoming and learning her gender.

Values assumed to be universally shared and therefore ideologically appropriate for representation in children's literature have continued to shift and evolve over time, and these changes have been reflected in children's literature. Enid Blyton's texts have been condemned for being racist, classist and sexist and therefore deemed unsuitable for today's impressionably absorbent young sponges, but it is important to realise the cultural and historical importance of such texts from the past – they can reveal a great deal about not only the values, morals and assumptions of the past, but also what we may take for granted: our values, morals

and assumptions *now*. Analysis of the Famous Five's tomboy George and her feminine opposite Anne reveals that Blyton's texts are *not* as one-sidedly sexist as widely touted; despite negative criticisms of Anne's domesticity, she represents far more than a depiction of passive femininity – as housekeeper for the Five, she plays a positive and important role within the group.

David Rudd has exposed a number of so-called 'expert' criticisms of Blyton's work as contradictory and based on blatant mis-readings (and even *non*-readings, it seems) of Blyton's work. As a result of such literary discourse a mythology of Blyton's work has developed, and it is well known for being of poor quality and reflecting unacceptable values. Analysis of the tomboy characters of George of the Famous Five series, and Bill of the Malory Towers series demonstrates how the tomboys *function* within the texts, which are *formulaic* works. By definition, formula and repetition go hand in hand – after all, in the very first instance, a series is a result of the repetition of some sort of formula. However, formula and repetition do not necessarily create flawed or inferior fiction. A secondary aim of this chapter was to present Blyton's texts as deliberately constructed formulaic works with variation, innovation, sophistication and value that has been often overlooked because of the pre-eminent preoccupation with their alleged political incorrectness and poor literary quality.

With the Song of the Lioness and Protector of the Small fantasy series by Tamora Pierce, we return to the *bildungsroman*, but these series are quite different

to the stories/series of development discussed in preceding chapters. Pierce's heroines Alanna and Kel dream of becoming knights, but unlike Jo March and Laura Ingalls, their dreams and ambitions are fulfilled: Alanna becomes a knight and gets married (after marriage, her storylines continue to be focused on her adventures as a knight), while Kel chooses to prioritise her career as a knight over romance/marriage, becoming a knight commander. As works of fantasy, both series reflect the politics of assent – although based in fantasy worlds, the values presented are based on real-world ideologically appropriate values – the triumph of good over evil, the value of hard work and perseverance, being loyal to friends, and so on. Being works aimed at a young audience, these texts have also been written with responsibility and appropriateness in mind. While these texts demonstrate just how much has changed since the time of *Little Women* – violent acts are committed by the protagonists and described in great detail, and Pierce writes about their first menstrual periods and developing bodies (this, of course, would be out of the question during the time of *Little Women* and *Little House*) – the author has spoken about her measured approach in writing for young people. She is aware not only of her 'responsibility' to her young audience but also the external forces with the power to ban her books (her publisher could refuse to publish them, for example) if their content is deemed inappropriate.

Although Pierce's series of development take their young female protagonists far beyond the more traditional female *bildungsroman* themes and endings of domesticity and marriage, what prevails strongly in *Lioness* and

Protector is what Judith Butler has termed the heterosexual matrix, or heterosexual hegemony.¹⁰ Despite shifts in gender roles which have allowed girls in children's fiction to successfully star as knights, the way in which 'masculine' and 'feminine' are portrayed in relation to one another has remained relatively constant. This is evident in *Lioness* and *Protector* as well as all of the texts discussed in the thesis. The reality presented in children's fiction is based on assumptions of heteronormativity and binary sexuality – male and female, masculine and feminine in a complementary relationship. To most adults, this way of thinking about gender is unproblematic, universally moral and normal and therefore unquestionably the reality that should be presented to children in literature – it is part of their ideological assumptions (the politics of assent) and part of the 'responsible' message they actively want to convey in texts (the politics of advocacy). Although marriage is no longer the only ideal ending for the female story of development, when marriage does occur, it is between a man and a woman. There have been books which have positively portrayed and acknowledged 'alternative families' and alternative sexuality but these are by no means accepted in the mainstream (if they are, they are examples of a 'special' theme – not examples of normality) and in some cases have been even banned and burned in the cause of the so-called non-corruption of children, and the preservation of the children's and society's morality and normality, as reflected in fiction – the self-preservation of the heterosexual hegemony.

¹⁰ Salih, S. "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions (1990)" [Editor's Introduction], in Salih, S., ed. with J. Butler. *The Judith Butler Reader*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, p.91.

As the original impetus driving girls to be tomboys – resentment for not being allowed to do what boys did – as girls have been able to make more choices regarding leisure activities, career and marriage, that original “need” to be like boys has faded over time. And so now, the “masculine” girl has become a somewhat disturbing figure; her so-called gender dysphoria threatens the status quo of hegemonic heterosexuality and the complementary relationship of the sexes, which are what authors and producers of children’s literature convey in the texts through the politics of advocacy and politics of assent, both consciously and subconsciously, blatantly and more subtly. Girls who actively and defiantly perform masculinity, like the Famous Five’s George are quaint characters in books deemed old-fashioned; the contemporary girl who now performs courageous feats once associated with masculinity is presented as unquestionably female and feminine in other ways. Although attitudes towards non-heterosexuality have become more tolerant, for the most part, mainstream society still wants children to grow up heterosexual (this is assumed and thought of as being ‘normal’ by many) – girls are expected to grow up to be recognizably feminine, boys to be recognizably masculine, and the books written for children reflect this desire to promote normality. What constitutes “femininity” and “female” may have changed in *Lioness and Protector* if compared to texts like the Famous Five, but *the female complement to male is emphasised even more strongly*, to eliminate any chance of misunderstanding by the young sponges who read the texts.

This thesis has studied more than the figure of the tomboy in children's series fiction. It has also examined the representation of gender in children's fiction, and the dynamics of children's series fiction, as well as the factors which have influenced its production and content. At the heart of all of this lies the crucial belief that continues to influence the content and production of children's literature: that children are like sponges and will absorb whatever they are exposed to in the literature that they read. This has played and continues to play a significant role in the production of children's literature. It has driven the adult desire to produce literature for children that educates and entertains them responsibly, literature which instructs and socialises them in appropriate values, behaviour, and ideas about the world. While certain social and cultural values have changed, the central concept of binary gender – male/female and masculine/feminine in complementary relationship, heterosexuality and heteronormativity, have remained constant. The tomboy has all but disappeared, but her replacement, the proactive, courageous, adventurous girl, will continue teaching young sponges ideologically appropriate gender lessons framed by the heterosexual hegemony.

Appendix A

Adventure and Mystery Series Group Dynamics

In this thesis, I focus on a number of popular children's mystery and adventure series, namely the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, the Trixie Belden Mystery series and the Famous Five. The tomboys in each of these series, George Fayne, Trixie Belden and George Kirrin are part of an adventuring or sleuthing group. The purpose of this appendix is to expand some of my ideas regarding the adventuring group dynamic that are extraneous to my thesis on the tomboy in children's literature, and to comment on their significance in children's series fiction. I will briefly discuss the adventuring group dynamic in relation to examples from popular children's series which do not include tomboys and therefore are not discussed within the thesis, including the Three Investigators,¹ the Hardy Boys,² and the Five Find-Outers.³ The sleuthing or adventuring group became a standard

¹ The Three Investigators series was created by Robert Arthur, who wrote titles #1–9 and 11. The other books in the series were written by four other authors, William Arden, Nick West, M. V. Carey and Marc Brandel. Although the series was not published under a pseudonym, the authors' names were unobtrusively printed on the title page and did not appear on the cover. The series consisted of 43 titles, published between 1964 to 1987. An excellent source of information on the series is "The Three Investigators U.S. Editions Collectors' Site" at <http://www.threeinvestigatorsbooks.homestead.com/index.html>, authored and maintained by Seth T. Smolinske.

² The Hardy Boys Mystery Stories, one of the Stratemeyer Syndicate's most successful series, was ghost-written and published under the pseudonym of Franklin W. Dixon. The series follows a similar publishing history to the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories. 58 volumes were published by Grosset and Dunlap from 1927 to 1979, out of which the first 38 were officially revised. Volumes 59–190 were published by Simon & Schuster from 1979 to 2005. A number of spin-offs have resulted, including The Hardy Boys Casefiles (1987 to 1998), Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys Super Mysteries (1988 to 1998), The Hardy Boys: The Clues Brothers (1997 to 2000) and the most recent and current incarnation, The Hardy Boys: Undercover Brothers (2005 to current). Also see footnote 4 in Chapter Three "The Clue of the Ghost-Written Tomboy (and her Cousin) Part I".

³ Written by Enid Blyton, this series comprised 15 titles, published from 1943 to 1961. The series is sometimes referred to as the "Mystery series" (The titles all began with "The Mystery of ..."), but

ingredient of adventure and mystery series in twentieth century American and British popular children's fiction.⁴

Edward Stratemeyer is credited by many for having popularised the adventuring group through his series fiction, starting with the Rover Boys series, published from 1899 to 1926. Many of Stratemeyer's series featured a duo or trio of young sleuths or adventurers who had contrasting physical appearance and personality, and importantly, complementary strengths, weaknesses and skills.⁵

A group of young sleuths or adventurers allows more to be physically accomplished – this is applied mathematics and hardly surprising. A group can split up to accomplish multiple tasks, track down clues and leads. But why have a group of *contrasting* members? Again, the obvious answer is that it is more *interesting* to have characters with distinctly different personalities, interests and physical

this can be confusing, as Blyton wrote a number of mystery series and books beginning with "The Mystery of..."; hence I refer to the series by the name of its sleuthing group, the Five Find-Outers.

⁴ Such 'groups' were not restricted to adventure and mystery series. The Seniors teen romance series by Eileen Goudge (1984 to 1986, 20 titles), which would be categorized as a Young Adult rather than children's series, featured a core group of best friends with contrasting physical appearance, temperament and interests: Kit McCoy (a talented dancer, with all-American good looks, with "butterscotch-blond" tousled hair), Alex Enomoto (a champion diver and athlete of Japanese-Irish descent, who has dark hair and "dark almond-shaped eyes"), Lori Woodhouse (shy and sensitive, stunningly beautiful, with long straight blond hair and "corn-flower blue" eyes), and Elaine Gregory (the quiet, neat, brainy one who wears glasses, with straight shoulder-length brown hair and brown eyes).

⁵ Carol Billman comments on Stratemeyer's adventuring groups: "Initially, the protagonists came only in sets: the Boy Hunters, the Outdoor Girls, the Darewell Chums, the Motor Girls, the Motor Boys. But for a few superficial physical and temperamental distinctions, the groups in these series were composed of identical elements. While the practice of heroes and heroines in the plural never died out, solo stars began to appear alongside the groups. Tom Swift, Ruth Fielding, Bomba, Nancy Drew, Kay Tracey, Linda Craig – these characters may be flanked by assistants and/or well wishers, but their achievement is singular, and their supporting cast are only foils that make this point plain. The supporting characters, what is more, tend to be typed to an even greater extent than the main characters (the fat friend, usually a clown; the admiring, often mooning, romantic interest; the good sport; the valiant underdog)" p.29. I will be commenting on the hierarchy within these groups as well as on "the fat friend", as featured in the Hardy Boys, Three Investigators and Five Find-Outers.

features. Who would want to read stories about three, four or five characters who were essentially the same?⁶ The *contrasting* group dynamic has further significance, which I will explore shortly. First, allow me to introduce the sleuthing groups I will be discussing in this paper.

The contrasting groups

The three boys who make up the Three Investigators are: Jupiter Jones the group's leader, who is fat and highly intelligent (the brains of the group), Pete Crenshaw who is physically strong (the brawn of the group) but surprisingly fearful and nervous in mysterious or supernatural situations, and Bob Andrews, who is physically the smallest boy of the group. Bob wears a brace on one leg as the result of a bad leg break. He takes advantage of his part-time job at the local library in his role as the group's researcher.

The Hardy Boys are two brothers: Frank, the older of the two, who has dark hair, and Joe, who has blond hair. Frank is cautious, Joe more impulsive. The Hardy

⁶ Interestingly, Enid Blyton's Secret Seven series (1949 to 1963, 15 titles) featured a group of inconsistently developed central characters. Three out of the Seven are fairly distinct: Peter is "[t]he undisputed leader of the Secret Seven... renowned for his quick thinking and crisp words to his fellow club members when they lose their badge or forget the secret password." He likes "getting his own way" and has a hot temper, p.75; Janet, Peter's sister, is "the most admirable of the three girls in the club as she is the only one who does not spend the majority of her time either giggling or crying". The club meetings are held in the shed at the bottom of Peter and Janet's garden, and one of Janet's roles is to provide food and drink for the meetings: "Definitely a believer in food being a catalyst in constructive thought, she revels in providing the Seven with sustenance for their adventures", p.66; Jack, second-in-command to Peter, "is the unfortunate brother of Susie, who sets out to destroy the Secret Seven whenever she can". Susie is not a member of the club and resents this fact, and she appears in each mystery to sabotage, mislead and cause trouble for the Seven. We know comparatively little about the other members of the Secret Seven, Colin, George, Pam and Barbara. In fact, Scamper, Peter and Janet's golden cocker spaniel and honorary associate to the Secret Seven, and the troublesome Susie is more developed as a character than those four. Quotations cited from Rice, Eva. *Who's Who in Enid Blyton: From Amelia Jane to Big Ears*. Revised ed. London: Orion, 2003.

Boys' friend Chester "Chet" Morton is regularly involved in their trips and mysteries. Whilst the Hardy brothers are fit and athletic, Chet is fat, and has an enormous appetite. In each book, Chet is usually bursting with enthusiasm regarding a new hobby or money-making scheme. Although he is not a particularly admirable or heroic character, Chet plays an important role in the Hardy Boys' series, which I will discuss in detail shortly. The Hardy Boys have other friends who are not part of the regular group, but make appearances from time to time as convenient and appropriate to plots. These friends also have distinct and contrasting personalities and appearance. Biff Hooper is known for his muscles and brawn, Phil Cohen is an artistic, black-haired Jewish Boy, and the Italian Tony Prito is a mechanical whiz and able boatman. Tony is a handy friend to have when the Hardys require assistance or repairs to vehicles and electronic gadgetry. There may well be another dimension to the role played by Tony and co:

The Hardys' boy friends are important throughout the series, but because the preteen kids reading the Hardy Boys are not particularly interested in romance, the presence of girls in the mysteries is insignificant. They have to make an appearance, of course, for otherwise the Hardy Boys and their pals' sexuality would be a little suspect.⁷

The Five Find-Outers are Larry Daykin, aged thirteen, his twelve-year-old sister Margaret, who is known as Daisy, Philip Hilton, who is twelve, and his baby

⁷ Kismaric, Carole and Marvin Heiferman. *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998, p.90. Chet's sister, Iola Morton is interested in Joe Hardy, and her friend Callie Shaw is interested in Frank. Of course, with the no-sex rule of the series, no kisses are exchanged (much like George and Bess's boyfriends Burt and Dave in the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories).

sister Elizabeth, known as Bets, who is eight years old. Although Larry is the elected leader of the group (elected by the others, it seems, mainly because he is the oldest), as the series progresses it becomes clear that the hero and star of the Five Find-Outers is Frederick Algernon Trotteville, known as Fatty. Fatty and Bets are the most developed characters of the group. Fatty battles with his weight, is highly intelligent (he brags to the others about his scholastic successes: “Early impressions of Fatty are not favourable. The other four see him as “plump, conceited and stupid”⁸) and as an only child of well-to-do parents receives large amounts of pocket money. As such, Fatty provides most of the funding for the group’s excursions and feasts of hot buttery crumpets, jammy buns and fresh macaroons at the local café and bakery. He is a master of disguise, which aids in the solving of the mysteries, as well as plunging the group into mysteries, usually in hilarious circumstances due to cases of mistaken identity. Bets is the baby of the group; she is teased and ridiculed by her brother Philip, who finds her innocent questions tiresome and embarrassing: she asks what “glues” are, meaning *clues*⁹; she asks if an alibi is anything to do with a lullaby.¹⁰ Bets cries easily and unintentionally reveals the group’s secrets, and in this respect fulfils a similar role to Anne of the Famous Five and Bess of the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories.

Potential for conflict, drama, suspense and rescue.

The adventuring group often features at least one member who is physically or even emotionally inferior to/weaker than the others. Bob Andrews of the Three

⁸ Rice, E. *Who’s Who in Enid Blyton*, p.95.

⁹ Blyton, Enid. *The Mystery of the Burnt Cottage*. London: Granada Publishing, 1979, p.17.

¹⁰ Blyton, Enid. *The Mystery of the Pantomime Cat*. London: Dragon Books, 1971, p.69.

Investigators is physically smaller than the other Investigators, and wears a brace on his leg as a result of a bad leg break. *Will Bob's leg hamper his escape from villains or supernatural beings?* Bets of the Five Find-Outers is small, easily intimidated and inadvertently gives away secrets. In *The Mystery of the Disappearing Cat* (1944) she is intimidated by Mr. Tuppington, the book's villain, who makes her cry.¹¹ The Hardy Boys' friend Chet is fat and an easy target for capture by villains. Like Bess Marvin, Chet tires easily.

Sometimes a member of the group is the unlucky one – one member is the one most captured, most in the wrong place at the wrong time. The Hardy Boys' different personalities determine who is more likely to get hurt; Frank is cautious; Joe more impulsive.

When trouble strikes, it usually hits accident-prone Joe first. He's the one who'll get knocked out flat by a fire truck or fall from a second-storey hotel window through a glass canopy. In *The Secret Warning* (1938), he is blown sky-high when a dry cleaner explodes and later nearly has the life squeezed out of him by a slimy giant octopus. It's Frank who saves him, every time.¹²

In other stories, it is Chet who is captured and must be rescued by the Hardys. The capture or incapacitation of a group member makes a dramatic rescue possible. Group members getting separated whilst in dangerous or mysterious situations provide suspense and the all-important thrill element. The potential for conflict

¹¹ Blyton, Enid. *The Mystery of the Disappearing Cat*. London: Granada Publishing, n.d., pp.29-30

¹² Kismaric, C. and M. Heiferman. *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*, p.67.

between members contributes to the drama: group members may disagree on a course of action to take, and one impetuous group member may then decide to go off on his or her own, under perilous circumstances.¹³

Comic relief

An important aspect of adventure and mystery series is humour; the stories aren't all action, suspense and solving mysteries. The group dynamic usually includes standard situations of comic relief, which is achieved in a number of ways. The first way is through dialogue: teasing, banter and general conversation between contrasting group members. The second is through different responses to situations; with different temperaments, skill levels and responses to situations, humorous outcomes may result. While not politically correct now,¹⁴ a number of these series use a fat person as a comic figure, making fun of their fatness and (it seems) permanent state of hunger. Chet Morton, regular companion of the Hardy Boys is a fat, permanently hungry boy. Many jokes are made of Chet's large appetite.

In one shopping stop midway through *The Short-Wave Mystery*, the growing boy buys a handful of chocolate bars, a bottle of lemon soda, half

¹³ This is a regular plot device used in the Famous Five and Trixie Belden series. In *Five Go Adventuring Again* (1942), George is the only one to see that Mr. Roland is two-faced and secretly intent on stealing her scientist father's research; in *Five Run Away Together* (1944), George makes plans to go to Kirrin Island by herself; in *Five Go Off to Camp* (1948) George is (quite unfairly) left out of the boys' plans and explores on her own. In Trixie Belden *The Mystery Off Old Telegraph Road* (1978) the Bob-Whites are divided over the decision to continue with a bikeathon fundraiser despite threats received.

¹⁴ The revisions of the Trixie Belden series removed unflattering references to Mrs. Smith in *The Red Trailer Mystery* (1950), who was a fat, jolly person (Knight, Melanie Kay. *Schoolgirl Shamuses, Incorporated*, Rheem Valley, CA: SynSine, 1998, pp.313-315 and 318). Although not derogatory by any means, such references could be interpreted negatively and as politically incorrect sentiments are not considered appropriate for a child audience. In the Harry Potter series Vernon and Dudley Dursley are both fat, but they are also the 'baddies'. The implied justification for making fun of them is their lack of other redeeming qualities.

a pound of fig crackers, three oranges, two ice cream cones, and small bottle of pickles, all of which he wolfs down.¹⁵

Chet is the male version of Nancy Drew's Bess. He fantasises about food and eats with gusto when the opportunity comes, just like Bess. Chet is called "fat", "a corpulent specimen", "stout", "pudgy" and "fatso."¹⁶ He complains when he gets tired, just as Bess does, and whilst he protests against danger and physical exertion, again, just like Bess does, he is keen to be a part of the group, *just like Bess*.

The Three Investigators' Jupiter is overweight and uses his appearance to his advantage, fooling adults and villains into thinking he is stupider than he is. By puffing out his cheeks, Jupiter appears convincingly to be a relative of the Investigators' patron, Alfred Hitchcock, to gain the boys entry to Hitchcock's movie studios.¹⁷ Fatty of the Five Find-Outers creates hilarious cases of mistaken identity through the use of his many disguises. On one occasion, he sits at the dining table for a meal with his cheek pads (used in disguises) still in his mouth, prompting his mother to plan a trip to the dentist for her swollen-faced son.¹⁸

Exposition and Information Provision

Group members may perform an expositional role, clarifying elements of the plot (for the 'slower' reader?), or, especially in the Stratemeyer series, imparting

¹⁵ Kismaric, C. and M. Heiferman, *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*, p.87.

¹⁶ Kismaric, C. and M. Heiferman, *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*, 87.

¹⁷ Arthur, Robert. *The Secret of Terror Castle*. London: Armada, 1986, p.22.

¹⁸ Blyton, Enid. *The Mystery of Banshee Towers*. London: Mayflower Books, 1970, pp.40-42.

educational themes and information to the reader. “From the earliest days of the Syndicate, Edward Stratemeyer wanted his literature for kids to educate as well as entertain them. Fascinating bits of esoteric information were woven through the mysteries.”¹⁹ By having a number of different people who can ask questions, exposition of plot and educational themes can be moved along via dialogue that seems natural.²⁰ The Hardy Boys’ Chet has a new interest in each book, whether judo, photography or ventriloquism. Chet is also very interested in money-making schemes, and he comes up with novel ideas:

Chet teaches himself taxidermy in *The Short-Wave Mystery* when he thinks it’s a way to make a buck; in *The Masked Monkey*, he organizes the gang to dredge up sunken golf balls and sell them back to country club managers. In *The Phantom Freighter*, he invents a mechanical herring that he plans to sell to commercial fishermen to use as bait, because they’ll last a lifetime.²¹

Chet’s diverse hobbies allow him to be the expert on a number of esoteric subjects. In *The Short-Wave Mystery*, with his newly found expertise in taxidermy, Chet tells the Hardys how stuffed otters are commonly mounted to walk straight, which is an error, as in nature they walk with a hunched back.²² In the *Three Investigators*, Jupiter has to explain the logic of his deductions to Pete and Bob, who are often unable to follow Jupiter’s train of thought, or simply do not possess the literary

¹⁹ Kismaric, C. and M. Heiferman, *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*, p.97

²⁰ Also see Chapter Three for a discussion of George and Bess’ expository role in the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories.

²¹ Kismaric, C. and M. Heiferman, *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*, p.87.

²² Kismaric, C. and M. Heiferman, *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*, p.97. In the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, George and Bess ask questions to facilitate explanation of themes of interest, see Chapter Three.

knowledge to fathom his solving of riddles, such as in *The Dead Man's Riddle* and *The Stuttering Parrot*. Similarly, in the Five Find-Outers, questions asked by the others of Fatty allow him to explain suspects, motives and so on, such as the detailed break-down of suspects in *The Mystery of the Pantomime Cat*.

Group members enhance the superiority of the series hero/heroine

In series such as Nancy Drew and Harry Potter, the title character is the heroine or hero, helped along by loyal friends. In the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories, George and Bess are clearly subordinate to Nancy. The cousins openly express their admiration and awe for Nancy's skills. The series has been criticised for Nancy's over-the-top superiority and perfection; it seems too good to be true that Nancy can read medieval English fluently and flawlessly, and is a natural at everything she tries. In the Harry Potter books, however, Harry is by no means a renaissance man; although he is extremely courageous and has natural ability as a Quidditch seeker, he is otherwise a very ordinary boy. His intellect and wizarding ability are nothing special. When we meet Harry, he is described as "small and skinny for his age", with "a thin face, knobbly knees" and "round glasses held together with a lot of Sellotape"²³ – hardly the image of a typical hero. Hermione far outshines Harry in magic ability and intelligence, but of course this serves its purpose in the group dynamic – Harry is the hero, Ron the loyal friend and Hermione the brains of the group. In the Three Investigators Jupiter has superior intelligence; without his deductive abilities it is doubtful whether Pete and Bob would be able to solve the puzzles and mysteries of their cases; Pete and Bob openly admire and acknowledge

²³ Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury, 2001, p.20.

Jupiter's superior abilities. Chet Morton's clumsiness and gluttony compares poorly to the image of the disciplined, athletic, All-American Hardy brothers – his presence enhances their heroic status.

Easy differentiation/identification of group members

Contrasting personalities and physical appearance of group members allows for easy differentiation between them. It possibly provides different kinds of likeable or admirable characters (some readers may be inspired by a courageous tomboy, others may look up to a strong, intelligent male leader, others may enjoy reading about the greedy one's food fantasies). These series (apart from Harry Potter) were originally published during a time when children's books contained internal illustrations. Such illustrations reflected the contrasting physical differences of the group members, and would have played a part in the reader's visualisation of the characters. Characters having different physical appearance would be easier to illustrate internally as well as on covers. In the Three Investigators internal illustrations, Jupiter is easily identified by his large frame and over-sized Hawaiian shirts, Pete is the tall blond boy with the crew cut hair and Bob is the dark-haired boy wearing spectacles.²⁴

The Hardy Boys, one of Stratemeyer's most successful creations, are brothers, one with blond hair, the other with dark hair. But their differences also extend to temperament:

²⁴ Also see Chapter Three for a brief discussion about Nancy, George and Bess' contrasting hair colours.

Frank's the logical thinker; Joe's the hotheaded, impetuous one. But if one of them is knocked for a loop in a fistfight or dangling perilously from a trapeze, his brother is there to rescue him. Neither Frank nor Joe needs to be perfect as an individual, because together, as a team, they are perfect.²⁵

This is an important point: if the group was composed of all 'perfect', invincible individuals, they would cease to be believable heroic children or teenagers, and become superheroes instead.²⁶ This is very true in the Harry Potter series; Harry is the hero, and although he is famous as The Boy Who Lived and is very courageous, he clearly could not have found the Philosopher's Stone without the help of his friends, nor could he have won the Tri-Wizard Cup on his own.

The sleuthing or adventuring group dynamic seen in popular children's mystery and adventure series fiction is based on characters which contrast with one another, in physical appearance as well as in personality and aptitude. The differences between group members create situations of conflict, humour and interest, all of which are designed to excite and appeal to the young audience of the series.

²⁵ Kismaric, C. and M. Heiferman, *The Mysterious Case of Nancy Drew & the Hardy Boys*, p.36.

²⁶ There is a significant distance between being heroic to being a superhero; one is based in reality (a courageous, plucky 'real' young person – rooted in possibility), the other, in fantasy (unattainable). One of the fantasies or desires of children that gets played out through their reading or playing of games is to be independent and victorious over adults; adults can be the disbelieving but well-meaning people who unwittingly or deliberately sabotage adventurers' plans by forcing chores on them, or they can be the villains. Refer to Sternheimer, K. *It's Not The Media*, pp.153-155: "Kids Fantasize About Triumphing over Adults: Advertising offers the possibility of getting around adult-placed limits, addressing the desire for kids to make their own decisions and challenge parental restrictions", p.154. And from Kismaric and Heiferman, p.98: "Kids who love to read the books – to escape, enjoy a good story, use their imaginations, solve a mystery – can't help but admire the young detectives' examples of how far a boy or girl can get if they learn to trust themselves and be who they really are."

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